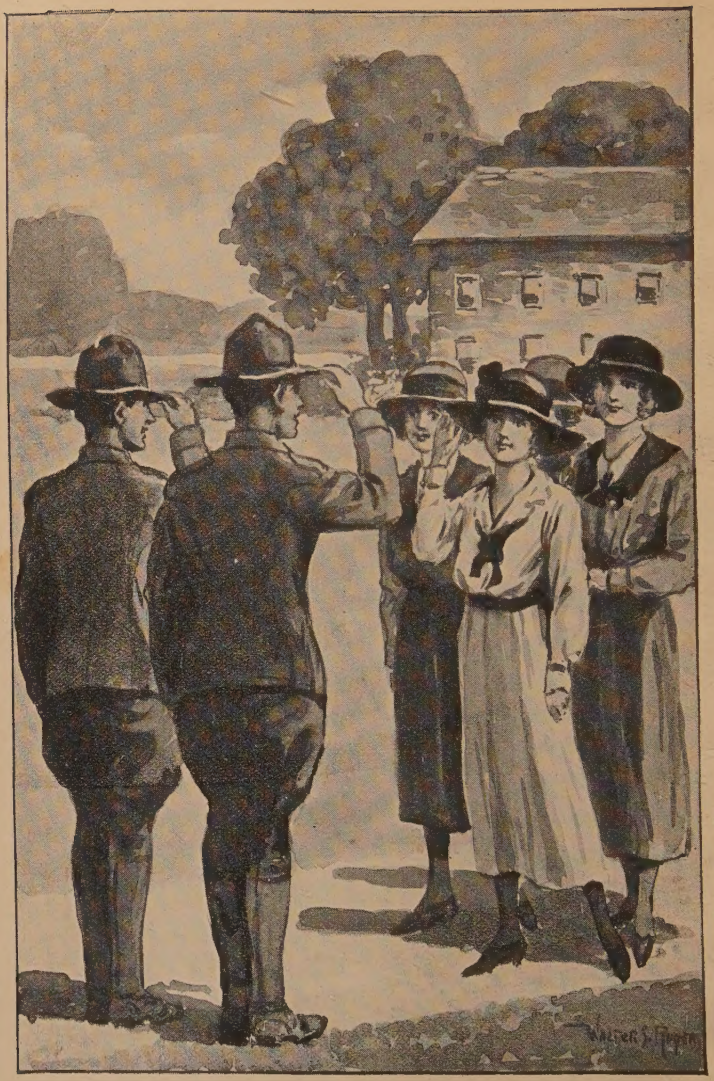
THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN ARMY SERVICE

LAURA LEE HOPE



THE FAME OF THE GIRLS HAD SPREAD ALL OVER THE BARRACKS.

The Outdoor Girls in Army Service. *Frontispiece* (*Page* 188)

The Outdoor Girls In Army Service

OR

DOING THEIR BIT FOR THE SOLDIER BOYS

BY

LAURA LEE HOPE

AUTHOR OF "THE OUTDOOR GIRLS OF DEEPDALE," "THE MOVING PICTURE GIRLS," "THE BOBBSEY TWINS," "BUNNY BROWN AND HIS SISTER SUE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK

GROSSET & DUNLAP

PUBLISHERS

Made in the United States of America

BOOKS FOR GIRLS

By LAURA LEE HOPE

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS SERIES

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS OF DEEPDALE
THE OUTDOOR GIRLS AT RAINBOW LAKE
THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN A MOTOR CAR
THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN A WINTER CAMP
THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN FLORIDA
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THE BOBBSEY TWINS ON THE DEEP BLUE SEA

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

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THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN ARMY SERVICE

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THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN ARMY SERVICE

CHAPTER I

"I'VE VOLUNTEERED!"

"WELL, who is going to read the paper?"

Amy Blackford stopped knitting for a moment, the half-finished sweater suspended inquiringly in the air, while she asked her question and gazed about impatiently at her busy group of friends.

"It's your turn, anyhow, Mollie," she added, fingers flying and head bent as she resumed her work. "You haven't read to us for five days."

"Oh, don't bother me," snapped the one addressed as Mollie. She was black-haired and black-eyed, was Mollie Billette, with a little touch of French blood in her veins that accounted for her restless vivacity and sometimes peppery temper. "You've made me drop a stitch, Amy Blackford, and if anybody else speaks to me for the next five minutes, I'll eat 'em."

"Well, as long as you don't eat any more of

my chocolates, I don't care," remarked Grace Ford, lazily helping herself to one of the threatened candies. "I had a full box this morning, and now look at them."

"Haven't time to look at anything," returned Mollie crossly, fishing in vain for the lost stitch. "If the poor soldiers depended upon the sweaters you made, Grace, I'd feel sorry for them, I would indeed!"

"Oh, dear, girls, now what's the matter?"

Framed in the doorway of the cottage stood Betty Nelson, their adored "Little Captain," fresh and sweet as the morning itself, smiling around at them inquiringly.

"What is the matter?" she repeated as they moved up to make room for her on the veranda steps. "I'm more afraid than ever to leave you alone these days when every dropped stitch means a quarrel. Give it to me, Mollie, I'll pick it up for you."

With a sigh, Mollie relinquished the tiresome sweater and Betty went to work at it with a skill born of long practice.

"There you are," she announced triumphantly, after an interval during which the girls had watched with eager eyes and bated breath. "That was a mean one. Thought it was going to make me rip out the whole row—but I showed it!

Now, please, don't anybody drop any more. I must finish that pair of socks to-day."

"Oh, dear," sighed Amy resignedly. "Then our last hope is gone."

"Goodness, that sounds doleful," chuckled Betty, stretching her arms above her head and reveling in the brilliant sunshine. "What particular thing seems to be the matter now, Amy? Has Will been misbehaving?"

Amy flushed vividly and bent closer over her work.

"How could he be when he's been in town for over a week?" she retorted with unusual spirit. "It's just that nobody will read the paper, and I'm just dying to hear the news. I want to keep up with the times."

"Well, if that's all," said the Little Captain, sitting up with alacrity, "I'm always willing to oblige. Mollie, you're sitting on it!"

"Knit one, purl two," chanted Mollie. "Wait till I get this needle off and I'll give it to you. I can't stop now!"

"All right, then I'm going to get my knitting."

Betty made as though to rise but Amy held her down and turned despairingly to Mollie.

"Mollie," she pleaded, "be reasonable. You know very well that if Betty ever gets started with her knitting then nobody'll read the news."

"Knit one, purl two, knit one, purl two," sang Mollie imperturbably. "There, now, isn't that beautiful?"

She sprang from the seat and whirled around upon them, holding up the almost-finished sweater for their inspection.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she repeated enthusiastically.

"Of course," said Grace dryly, while Betty deftly grabbed the paper. "It's the most beautiful and most curious thing I ever laid eyes on. It isn't as though," she added, with biting sarcasm, "I had seen hundreds just like it within the last month or two——"

"Oh, you can't make me mad," said Mollie, settling down with energy to the final finishing. "You're just jealous, that's all, and the more you turn up your nose, the more you show your real feelings."

"Oh, is that so?" retorted Grace, reaching out for the candy box for the twentieth time that morning. "Well, as my kind of nose has never, under any circumstances whatsoever, been known to turn up——"

"Oh, do stop chattering," Mollie interrupted heartlessly. "Who cares what kind of noses we've got? Go ahead, Betty, you'd better get

started before Grace gets to quarreling on the subject of eyelashes or something."

"I never quarreled with my eyelashes," said Grace haughtily. "I leave that to other people."

"My, isn't she conceited!" chuckled Betty. "Now I'm going to read," she added, letting her eyes rest upon the glaring headlines of the first page. "If you want to listen, all right; and if you want to talk about sweaters and eyelashes——"

"Oh, Betty, do go on," sighed Amy. "We've been waiting so long."

"All right," said Betty obligingly; then, as the full sense of what she read was borne in upon her, her face clouded and she bit her lip and shook her head.

"Girls," she began, and something in her tone made them drop their knitting for a moment and gather anxiously about her. "Those, those—Germans—"

"Huns, you mean," interrupted Mollie fiercely, as she read over the Little Captain's shoulder.

"Have sunk another of our ships," said Betty, her lips set in a straight line. "And—and they think the loss will be heavy. Oh, girls, I can't read it—it's too horrible!"

She flung down the paper, but Mollie snatched it almost before it reached the step. Then with

eyebrows drawn together, and twin spots of red flaming in either cheek, she read the account of the disaster from beginning to end.

"There," she said at last, flinging down the paper and glaring about her as though the girls themselves were at fault. "Now you see what we're knitting sweaters for, and—and—everything! Oh, if I could just put on a uniform, and take up a gun and—and—go after those—those awful Huns!"

"Goodness, if you looked like that," commented Grace, "you wouldn't have to fire a shot. They'd all drop dead just from fright."

"So much the better," said Mollie, beginning to knit again ferociously. "It would be a shame to waste good ammunition on them."

"I wonder," said Betty thoughtfully, her eyes on the far-off horizon, "what the boys are going to do. They've seemed so mysterious lately, and the minute you begin to question them about enlisting, they change the subject."

"Yes, and it's made me desperate," cried Mollie, the tempestuous, flinging down the unfortunate sweater once more. "I know what I'd do if I were a man, and Betty and all the rest of us girls! But either they didn't know or they wouldn't tell. Do you suppose——"

"They've decided to wait for the draft?" fin-

ished Grace, settling her cushions more comfortably. "That's a funny thing to say, Mollie —about our boys."

"I know," said Mollie, knitting more furiously than ever. "But just the same, I can't understand why they have been so terribly secretive about it."

"I guess we needn't worry about that," said Betty, although there was a little worried line between her brows that belied her words. "Allen wouldn't——" here she stammered, stopped and flushed, while the girls turned laughing eyes upon her.

"Of course," she added hastily, "I mean that none of the boys would hesitate, when it's a question of serving his country."

"That's all right, but you said Allen," teased Mollie, unconvinced. "And oh, Betty, how you blushed!"

"Nonsense!" returned Betty, blushing more than ever. "It's just sunburn, that's all. Now do you want me to read the rest of the news, or don't you? Because I have to finish those socks——"

"Yes, yes, go on," cried Amy. "We won't say another word, Betty." Which was funny, coming from quiet Amy, who usually spoke one word to the other girls' ten.

So Betty read the news from one end of the paper to the other, until even those insatiable young people were content, then ran into the cottage to get her knitting.

"Now," she said, returning and seating herself with businesslike alertness on the very edge of the step, "you'll see some real speed."

"Oh, Betty, have you come to the heel?" cried Mollie, running over to the Little Captain, and regarding the flying needles with a sort of awe. "Please show me how. They say the Red Cross needs socks for the boys more than they need anything else. And I know I'll never learn to do them."

"Oh, it's easy," returned Betty, obligingly slowing down for their benefit, while they gathered about her, eager and bright-eyed, for the lesson.

They formed a pretty picture, this group of outdoor girls, with the morning sunlight falling upon graceful figures and bent heads, ardent little patriots, every one of them, whole-heartedly eager to give their all for the service of their country.

They were still engrossed in watching Betty's nimble fingers, when the shrill and familiar whistle of the little ferryboat caught their attention.

"Oh, I didn't know it was time," Amy was beginning, when Mollie interrupted her.

"It's stopping here," she cried. "And somebody's getting off."

"It's the boys!" cried Betty, springing to her feet, the bright color again flooding her face. "They never told us they'd be back to-day. There's Allen. Oh, tell me, what is it he is shouting?"

The little ferryboat had steamed away, and four figures were racing toward them.

"Betty," yelled the foremost of these. "I've volunteered—I've volunteered!"

CHAPTER II

GRIM SHADOWS OF WAR

"WHAT is that he is yelling?" questioned Mollie.

"He said something about volunteering," returned Betty.

"Volunteering!" came from Mollie, Grace and Amy simultaneously, and in the excitement of the moment, their knitting was completely forgotten.

And now while the girls are waiting for the boys to come up, let me take just a moment to tell my new readers something concerning these girls and the other volumes in this series of books.

The leader of the quartette was Betty Nelson, often called the "Little Captain." Betty was a bright, active girl, who always loved to do things.

Grace Ford was tall and slender, and a charming conception of young womanhood. She had a brother, Will, who at times was rather hasty, and occasionally this would get him into trouble,

much to the annoyance of his sister. Grace herself had one failing, if such it could be called. She was exceedingly fond of chocolates, and was never without some of this confection in her possession.

Some years before there had been a mystery concerning Amy Blackford. She had then been known by the name of Stonington, but the mystery had been unraveled by the finding of her long lost brother, Henry Blackford. Amy was of a quiet disposition, and more timid than any of the others.

The quartette was completed by Mollie Billette, often called "Billy." Mollie was the daughter of a well-to-do widow of French ancestry, and the girl was a bit French herself in her general make-up.

In our first volume, entitled "The Outdoor Girls of Deepdale," the particulars were given of the organization of a camping and tramp club by the girls, and of how they went on a tour, which brought them many adventures.

After this first tour the Outdoor Girls went to Rainbow Lake, and then took another tour, this time in a motor car. After that, they had some glorious days on skates and iceboats while at a winter camp, and then journeyed to Florida, where they took a trip into the wilds of the in-

terior, and participated in many unusual happenings.

Returning from the land of orange groves, the girls next took a trip to Ocean View. Here they had a glorious time bathing, and otherwise enjoying themselves, and also solved the mystery surrounding a box that was found in the sand.

During those strenuous days the girls had made many friends, including Allen Washburn, who was now a young lawyer of Deepdale. Allen had become a particular friend of Betty's, and this friendship seemed to be thoroughly reciprocal.

Will Ford's particular high-school chum had been Frank Haley, and as a consequence, Frank had been drawn into the circle, along with Roy Anderson, another young man of the town.

These young fellows often went off camping, and usually in the vicinity of where the girls had planned to spend their outing days.

Deepdale was a picturesque city of about fifteen thousand people, located on the Argono river, which, some miles below, emptied into Rainbow Lake. Back of Deepdale was a rich farming country, which tended to make the town a prosperous one.

Returning from Ocean View, the girls started on a new outing, as related in the volume before

this, entitled "The Outdoor Girls on Pine Island." The girls occupied a bungalow, which had been turned over for their use by an aunt of Mollie Billette. The boys were in a camp near by.

Quite by accident both girls and boys had stumbled upon a gypsy cave, cleverly hidden in the underbrush, and had afterward succeeded in rounding up the entire gypsy band, incidentally regaining some property which had been stolen from the girls.

Now, at the time our story opens, the Outdoor Girls were again at Pine Island, in the cottage lent them by "Aunt Elvira"; but times had changed, and they were no longer solely upon pleasure bent. The grumbling, menacing unrest of war seemed in the very air they breathed, and from dawn to evening they thought of very little else.

Now at the ringing shout, "I've volunteered," they were on their feet, fairly trembling with excitement and eagerness.

"Allen, Allen!" cried Betty, the color flaming into her face. "Oh, I'm so glad! I'm so glad!"

"Gee, he's not the only one," cried a big, strapping lad, Frank Haley, by name, throwing himself upon the steps, and looking up at the girls triumphantly. "Just because he can run faster than we can, he gets all the credit."

"You, too, Frank?" cried Betty, turning upon him with shining eyes.

"And here comes Roy," put in Mollie. "Did he——"

"You just bet he did," Roy Anderson, red and perspiring, answered for himself. "Did you ever hear of an Irishman staying out of a fight? I'm aching already to get my hands on Fritz."

"What's the matter with Will?" asked Grace a little anxiously, for the young fellow coming slowly toward them with downcast eyes and bent head was her brother. "He looks as if he'd lost his last friend."

Seven pairs of eyes were immediately focused upon the apparently despondent figure, while the boys shifted uneasily and looked vaguely troubled.

"Hello, folks," Will saluted them, as he sank down upon the lower step, and looked out toward the water. "Why the sudden hush?"

For a moment no one spoke. They were all strangely embarrassed by this unusual attitude of Will's. He had always been so frank and outspoken. And now——

"Oh, for Pete's sake, say something!" he burst forth at last, looking up at the silent group defiantly. "You were making enough noise before, but the minute I come along, you just stop short

and stare. I didn't know I was so fascinating."

"You're not," said Mollie promptly.

With an impatient grunt, Will stuffed his hands into his pockets and stalked off into the woods.

"Well," said Grace, with a long sigh, "I never saw Will act that way before. Now what's the matter?"

"Indigestion, probably," said Allen, trying to pass it off. "He acts just the way I feel when I have it. Which reminds me that I'm getting mighty all-fired hungry."

"Well, you don't get anything to eat," said Betty decidedly, "until you tell us all about everything, since the day you left here so mysteriously to the present time."

"Seems we've got to sing for our supper—or rather, breakfast," said Frank with a grin. "Go ahead, Allen, but be brief. I want some of Betty's biscuits."

"Goodness, do you suppose Betty's going to start in and cook biscuits, now?" cried Mollie. "Why, we just got through our own breakfast."

"Well, we didn't," said Roy, nibbling a piece of grass for want of something better. "And you ought to take it as a proof of our devotion, that we didn't stop for any. We were too anxious to get here to tell you our news."

"And blow a little," scoffed Mollie, the irrepressible.

"Oh, for goodness' sake stop talking," entreated Betty, with her hands to her ears. "If the boys want biscuits they shall have them—if I have to stay up all night to cook some for them. They can have anything in the house, as far as I'm concerned."

"Hear, hear!" cried the boys in chorus, looking up admiringly at her flushed face.

"If volunteering has that effect," Roy added, "I'm going back and do it all over again."

"You said it," agreed Frank. "Gee, but I'm hungry!"

"Did you say we could have anything we wanted?" Allen was demanding of the Little Captain in an undertone. "No exceptions?"

"None," said Betty, dimpling.

"Then," said Allen deliberately, his eyes fixed steadily upon her sparkling face. "If you please —I'll take—you!"

"Oh," gasped Betty, her eyes falling before the young lawyer's ardent gaze, while the rich color flooded her face. "I said anything—not anybody. Allen, please don't be foolish. They're all looking at us."

"Well, you can't blame 'em," Allen retorted whimsically. "They're not used to seeing two

such good-looking people together," he added in bland explanation.

"My, don't we hate ourselves!" said Betty, dimpling again. "But go ahead and tell us your adventures," she added, glad to change a subject which was becoming too personal. "No story—no supper, you know."

"We don't want supper—we want breakfast," interrupted Frank, with a grin. "What have you been saying to her, Allen—to get her dates mixed like that?"

"Allen Washburn, are you going to tell that story or are you not?" queried Mollie, in a menacingly quiet tone of voice. "If you're not——"

"Yes, ma'am," said Allen meekly. "Where shall I begin, please?"

"At the beginning," said Grace sarcastically, and reached for her candy box, grimacing to find it empty.

"Thank you," said Allen courteously. "Well, as you know, we four husky braves meandered from the island one bright morning in the early part of the week to seek our fortune, as it were, in the city of promise."

"Yes, that's all it does do," Roy put in pessimistically. "Promise!"

"As I was saying," Allen continued, settling himself in a more comfortable position on the

steps, and ignoring the interruption. "We sauntered off, and straightway looked up a recruiting station."

"Oh!" gasped Amy, hands clasped and eyes shining. "That must have been exciting."

"Well, I don't know," said Allen, scratching his head reflectively, "that that part was so exciting, but wait till you hear what happened afterward. After we found where the recruiting office was, we went to the hotel we were stopping at, and punished a mighty big breakfast. You see, we figured out that we were going to put our necks into the noose, as it were, and we wanted something good and big to stand up on."

"Wouldn't your feet do?" asked Betty innocently.

"Heavens, no!" replied Allen, answering the query in solemn earnest, while the girls giggled, and the boys grinned appreciatively. "We were so nervous by that time we weren't sure we had any feet."

"All you had to do was to look," murmured Mollie maliciously. "You couldn't miss 'em."

Allen looked hurt, got up and sat on his feet.

"If you don't see them, perhaps you'll forget about them," he offered by way of explanation. "You don't know how sensitive I am on the subject of feet."

"I couldn't blame you," Mollie was beginning, when Betty broke in with a little despairing cry for help.

"If we don't stop them," she said, looking appealingly about her, "we won't get any farther than breakfast. Allen, what did you do next?"

"Next?" queried Allen, stretching his long legs and squinting up at the sun. "Let me see. Oh yes! Having put down a breakfast that must have added four pounds to our weight, we sauntered forth once more to meet our doom. By that time we were so nervous, we almost mistook a café on the corner for the recruiting station——"

"Hey, speak for yourself, won't you?" queried Roy, adding, as he turned to the girls with a grin, "We had to show Allen a performing monkey on the street, and get his mind off, before we succeeded in engineering him to the right place."

"Gee, some fellows have a gift," said Allen, regarding Roy admiringly. "If I could tell 'em like that, old man, I'd be Supreme Court Justice before the month was up.

"Well, as I was saying," he continued, "after much hesitation and side-stepping, we at last succeeded in reaching our destination. After that, it took ten minutes to get up nerve to go in.

"When we had at last tremblingly ascended the

stairs, we found ourselves in a large room, with all the windows open and half a dozen wise-looking men, whom we took to be doctors, presiding. There were three or four other fellows in the room, come like ourselves, to be examined. Then we were shoved behind a huge screen with half a dozen other huskies—they looked like prize fighters to me—and told to take our clothes off. Then—we were examined."

"Well?" they queried, leaning forward eagerly.

"Well," said Allen, waving his hand in a deprecating gesture, "of course, being the perfect specimens of manhood we are, the committee jumped at us."

"If they'd jumped on you they'd have shown more taste," remarked Mollie unflatteringly.

"But, Allen," put in Grace, who had listened to the recital, with a troubled frown on her forehead, "was Will with you?"

Allen's glance fell and he shoved his hands deep into his pockets.

"No," he said.

CHAPTER III

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

THERE was another awkward pause, which nobody seemed able to break.

"But Will went to town with you," Amy remarked at last.

"Yes, he went with us," Allen agreed reluctantly. "But after we reached the hotel, and were making our plans for enlisting, he refused to go with us, saying he had business of his own to attend to. What that business was none of us know, for we were getting ready to catch the train for here when he rejoined us. However," he added loyally, "I'd bet my bottom dollar that Will has good reasons for everything he does, and when he gets ready he'll tell us about them. In the meantime, how about some biscuits, Betty?"

"Yes, how about them?" added Roy, rousing to sudden life. "We've done our duty—now we want the reward."

"Goodness, you haven't done anything," said

Grace loftily, as the Little Captain vanished within the house, followed by black-eyed Mollie. "You just sit around and let all the others do the work and then take the credit to yourself."

"That's all right if you can get away with it," grinned Allen. "Besides," he added, with a humorous glance at Grace's languid figure, "you don't look the soul of energy yourself this morning, Miss Ford."

"Looks are often deceitful," retorted Grace, languidly turning the heel of her sock. "If you had to knit all day long, every day in the week, you'd find out what work is."

"Well, you don't *have* to do it," returned Roy placidly.

"Yes," said gentle Amy, roused to sudden indignation. "That's all the credit we get. Goodness knows, we're glad enough to do the work, but we do like it to be appreciated."

Roy turned half way round, and regarded Amy's flying fingers and bent head soberly for a moment.

"I'm sorry," he said then, so gravely that she looked up in surprise, and even Grace stopped knitting. "I didn't mean that we fellows don't appreciate what you girls are doing for us. We do—and there'll come a time when we'll appreciate it still more. When we're in the trenches

up to our knees in mud and water, when the wind finds the chinks in our clothing, and freezes us to the bone, when——"

"Oh, please don't!" cried Amy, clapping her hands to her ears. "I can't even bear to think of those things."

"Yet those are some of the things we've got to think about," said Roy, still with that unusual gravity. "It's because you girls have thought of those things, that you're giving your time and energy to preparing for them, and warding them off. Please don't ever again think that we're ungrateful."

"We won't," said Amy softly, fighting back a sudden mistiness which had come before her eyes. "We'll just go on knitting ten times harder than before."

"I think we're missing something," came Betty's voice from the doorway, where she stood with her arm intertwined in Mollie's. "The biscuits are in the oven now, and we're going to talk to you while they're baking."

"Will it take long?" asked Roy, sniffing hungrily.

"I like that," said Betty, with a little grimace, as she flung herself upon the top step, pulling Mollie down beside her. "When Roy has to choose between biscuits and us——"

"We're not in it," finished Mollie with a merry laugh.

Roy looked pained.

"I never said that, did I?" he inquired. "I haven't had the painful necessity of making a choice yet."

"What were you talking about so earnestly when we came out?" queried Betty. "Roy looked solemn, Grace looked surprised, Amy looked exalted, and Allen was thoughtful, while Frank looked as though—well, as though he were seeing visions."

"All I have to do is turn my head to see visions," Frank returned gallantly, suiting the action to the word. "Gee, I never saw a crowd of prettier girls."

"Hey, you're going to get an extra biscuit for that," put in Roy, raising himself on his elbow and looking alarmed. "Just because you're a better flatterer than I am——"

"Oh, hush, hush," protested Betty, showing all her dimples—Allen was watching, so we have his authority for it. "You boys can never get to the point, unless we happen to be talking of something to eat. Allen, what were they talking about?"

Allen roused himself from the happy reverie into which Betty's dimples had thrown him, and

responded good-naturedly. Allen was invariably good-natured.

"We were talking about some of the things we may be up against, when we find ourselves in the trenches, face to face with the enemy," he said. "Also we were saying that these sweaters, and mufflers and socks you are knitting, will come in mighty handy over there."

A shadow crossed Betty's bright face, and she leaned forward to pick up the discarded paper she had thrown upon the porch.

" 'The enemy attacked in force our lines south of Cambrai,' " she read, with puckered brow. " 'The enemy succeeded in gaining a foothold in our first line trenches, but were later driven back. The fighting on both sides was sanguinary, and heavy losses were sustained!' "

She flung the paper from her, and regarded her friends with flaming eyes, and both little fists clenched close at her sides.

"It doesn't seem as though it *could* be real!" she cried. "Men killing each other off by the hundreds and all for—what? Oh, it's cruel, cruel!"

"Of course it's cruel," said Allen grimly. "But so were the Huns cruel, centuries ago. The German people have simply never advanced beyond

that state. They're still in the first stages of civilization."

"Yes, and the worst part of this kind of warfare," said Frank, his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the horizon, "is that each man in the army is simply a unit in a great machine. In the old days, when they had cavalry charges and hand-to-hand fighting there was some romance, some adventure, some chance for personal bravery."

"Well, of course there is still some chance for daring," remarked Allen, "especially in the aviation branch of the service."

"In the army too," added Roy. "Soldiers are being decorated every day for some special act of bravery."

"I know all that," replied Frank. "But there's nothing particularly spectacular about it."

"And yet," said Betty thoughtfully, "I should think that kind of fighting would take more courage than the other. To stand day after day in those horrible trenches waiting for orders. And then when they do finally make a charge, nothing much seems to be gained by it."

"Yes, the waiting must be the hardest part," agreed Allen. "We met an Englishman in town," he added, smiling at the recollection, "and he was a mighty interesting chap."

"You said it," agreed Frank heartily. "He's

been through some of the heaviest fighting, and to hear him tell some of his experiences is better than a dozen lectures. I wish we could have brought him along so you girls could have heard him."

"I don't," Roy interjected. "He was too good-looking."

"All the more reason why you should have brought him," yawned Grace. "It would be a treat to have around something good to look at."

"Whew," whistled Frank. "That was a bad one, Gracie. We know we're not Adonises——"

"I'm glad you know something," Grace was beginning, when once more Betty interrupted her.

"Oh dear!" she said, "if you don't hurry, the biscuits will be done, and we won't have heard anything about the nice Englishman. And I'm very much interested."

"Oh, you are, are you?" said Allen, sitting up. "I begin to think we made a mistake in mentioning that Englishman. I think we must have dreamed him, fellows."

"Oh, he was real enough," put in Frank. "But I shouldn't wonder if he dreamt some of those adventures. They sounded too good to be true."

"Perhaps you've heard that old saying," Grace remarked, with her usual languor, "that truth is stranger than fiction?"

"Oh, hurry," begged Betty. "The biscuits are almost done; I can smell them."

"So can I," said Roy, with another longing sniff. "Don't let 'em burn, will you, Betty?"

"I will, if somebody doesn't satisfy my curiosity, right away," threatened the Little Captain, her lips set threateningly. "Now, will you be good?"

"Gee, Allen, did you hear that?" Roy's expression was pathetic. "Hurry it up, will you?"

"Well," began Allen with aggravating deliberation, "he was a tall, lean, rangy fellow with sandy hair and twinkling eyes. Seems he had been wounded several times, and the last shot had cost him his right arm."

"Oh," cried Mollie, her eyes like two saucers. "How did that happen?"

"Bomb exploding close to him shot it all to pieces," explained Allen cryptically. "Of course it had to be amputated, permanently disabling him. That's why he was sent across to America —to stimulate recruiting."

"As if we needed any stimulating," said Mollie indignantly. "You don't have to stand behind our boys with a gun to make them go."

"Of course not," agreed Allen. "Just the same, it's almost impossible for us over here, with the broad Atlantic separating us from the scene of

conflict, actually to realize what we're up against. That's why it's good to have a fellow like this Englishman, who has really been right in the thick of it, relate his own experiences. While he was talking you could almost hear the thunder of cannon and the bursting of shells. I tell you, we fellows felt like shouldering our guns, and marching over right away."

"Oh, it's wonderful to be a man these days," sighed Mollie. "You can get right in the thick of it, while all we can do is stay home and root for you."

"Well, that's a lot," said Frank soberly. "Just to feel that you girls are backing us up, and that there's somebody who cares whether we give a good account of ourselves or not, makes all the difference in the world."

"But that's not all we can do," cried Betty, her eyes shining with the light of resolution. "There's real work enough to keep us busy all day long. Girls, I've got a plan!"

"What?" they cried, leaning forward eagerly.

"I'm going to join the Red Cross!"

CHAPTER IV

THE POWDER MILL

"Who's game for a paddle?"

"I am!"

"And I!"

"Oh, it's the most wonderful night in the world for canoeing!"

"And there's going to be a moon, too!"

"Nobody seems to be eager or anything like that," remarked Frank, strolling out on the veranda, and regarding the enthusiastic group with a smile on his lips. "Why didn't you suggest something they might agree to, Allen?"

Allen, who had indeed made the suggestion, rose lazily to his feet, and stretched out a hand to Betty.

"I never make any suggestions that aren't good," he replied. "Come along, Betty. It's a crime to waste a minute of this wonderful night."

"May we, Mrs. Irving?" queried Betty, smiling up at their chaperon, who was the same who had shared their adventures, during that other event-

ful summer on Pine Island. "You know you love canoeing as much as the rest of us."

"Of course we'll all go," Mrs. Irving assented readily. "Only we've had a long day, and mustn't stay out too late."

"I speak for Mrs. Irving in my canoe!" called out Betty.

"No, mine!" "Ours!" were other cries.

Merrily the girls ran into the house to pick up the wraps which were always necessary on the water at night, and in another minute they had rejoined the boys.

"Are you glad I enlisted, Betty?" queried Allen, laying a hand on Betty's arm, and holding her back.

"Glad?" answered Betty, looking up at him with eyes that shone in the starlight. "Yes, I'm glad that you knew the only right thing to do, and I'm glad that you did it so promptly. But, Allen——"

"Yes?" he queried, finding her little hand and holding it tight.

"I—I'm like George Washington, I guess," she evaded, looking up at him with a crooked little smile.

"I don't want you to tell a lie," he countered very softly. "I want the truth, little Betty. What were you going to say?"

Betty's eyes drooped, and they walked along in silence for a minute.

"Well?" he queried at last, studying her averted profile. "You're not afraid to tell me, Betty?"

"N-no," she answered, still with her head turned away. "I was only going to say, that while I'm glad—oh, very glad in one way, I—I'm not so very glad in another."

"What other?" he asked, leaning over her. "Betty, Betty, tell me, dear."

Betty hesitated for another moment, then threw up her head defiantly.

"Well," she said, "if you must know—I don't want you to go. I—I'll be—lonesome——"

"Betty," he cried imploringly, his heart beating like a trip-hammer, "Betty—wait——"

But she had slipped from him, and had run ahead to join the others, so that he had no other course but to follow her. His head was in the clouds—his feet scarcely seemed to touch the ground.

"Well, it's about time you realized you were with us," Mollie remarked as Betty, breathless with the run and the beating of her heart, joined them. "We began to think you had eloped for fair this time."

Betty laughed happily.

"I'm sure I don't know where we'd elope to," she remarked, stepping one dainty foot exactly in the center of the unstable craft. "We'd either have to swim or wait for the ferry, and I don't exactly know which would be the more uncomfortable."

"I'd prefer the swim," said Roy, arranging the pillows carefully behind Mollie's straight little back. To quote the latter: She would much rather do things for herself—boys were so clumsy—but they always looked so funny and downhearted when she told them about it, that, just in the interest of ordinary kindness, she had to humor them!

"Well," said Allen, as he dipped his paddle into the still water, guiding the light craft from the shore, "where shall we go?"

" 'Where do we go from here, boys, where do we go from here?' " sang Roy.

" 'Anywhere from Harlem to a Jersey City pier,' " finished Frank, wickedly splashing some drops of water on Grace's immaculate white dress.

"That's sensible, isn't it?" retorted the latter, favoring the offender with a look of cold disdain. "Since we don't happen to be any more than sixty miles from Harlem or Jersey City, I'm sure Allen appreciated your suggestion."

"Oof!" said Frank. "I can't open my mouth without putting my foot in it."

"That's no compliment to your mouth," returned Grace. "Frank, if you don't stop splashing me with that horrid water, I'm going to get out and walk."

"That would be jumping from the frying pan into the fire," returned Frank with a grin, while Mollie, who was in the next canoe, chuckled audibly.

"Goodness," said Betty, as Allen shortened his stroke to bring the canoes abreast. "It's almost impossible to think of there being a war on a night like this. Everything is so calm and peaceful."

"Yes, we haven't even been touched by it yet," said Allen, his mood sobering. "The Englishman to-day was telling us that nobody in England began to realize they were at war, until the boys began to come back wounded and disabled."

"Oh, I can't bear to think of it," cried Amy, who, in the canoe with Will, still silent and aloof, had scarcely spoken a word till now. "It seems as if there ought to be some other way of settling disputes these days."

"That's what every nation thinks, except Germany and her allies," returned Frank. "As it is, we've got to fight her as we'd fight a mad dog——

wipe the whole German nation off the map, or at least, bring it to its knees."

"That reminds me of something one of the recruiting officers told me the other day," put in Allen, with a whimsical smile. "He said he had talked to hundreds of American enlisted men, and the great majority of them were eager to learn German."

"I don't admire their taste," put in Mollie, with spirit. "I hate the very sound of it."

"Well, the soldier's idea is," explained Allen, "that if he learns the language he'll be able to flirt with the *frauleins* when he gets to Berlin.'

"Again I don't admire their taste," remarked Mollie spitefully. "Almost all the German girls I've ever seen are too stout to suit me.'

"Goodness, I had a German ancestor away back somewhere," remarked Amy anxiously. "Maybe that's why I'm beginning to gain flesh so fast. You've got me worried."

The boys laughed, but the girls answered reassuringly.

"It isn't your remote German ancestor that's giving you flesh, Amy," said Grace condescendingly. "It's eating three hearty meals a day, and the sitting still knitting from morning to night. We girls are used to being on the go all the time."

"What's that you said?" asked Frank, bringing his eyes down from the stars to the lazy figure in the white dress. "I've never seen you when you weren't taking life easy."

"What!" said Grace, sitting up straight, the picture of indignation. "How about our walking tour—didn't I walk just as far, and as much as the other girls then? And how about swimming?"

"Take it back! take it back!" cried Frank. "If going down on my knees will help any——"

"Don't be a goose," responded Grace shortly, settling herself once more in a comfortable position. "Just a little bit of going down on your knees, and we'll be in the water. Have a chocolate?"

"No, thanks," said Frank absently. His eye had caught a sudden flare of light, that had flickered for a moment and then disappeared.

"Hey, Allen," he yelled. "Did you see that light—over there, to the right?"

"Yes," said Allen, looking puzzled. "And I don't remember ever seeing signs of life over in that direction."

"Isn't that about where the old powder mill stands?" asked Betty, and Allen turned to her quickly.

"Betty," he said, his eyes shining, "you've got it. The government has bought that property,

and started the old mill to working. By George, this promises to be interesting."

"There it is again!" cried Frank, while Grace strained her eyes eagerly toward the point. "What do you say to paddling over there and having a look?"

"It's up to the girls," replied Allen, watching Betty's face eagerly. "What they say goes."

"And they say 'go,' " smiled Betty whimsically. "Do you suppose we'd go back without solving the mystery? Lead on, Macduff—we follow."

So Allen and Frank paddled hard toward the bend in the lake, the other two canoes, which had fallen somewhat behind, quickening the stroke to catch up with them, sensing that something unusual was afoot.

As the canoes in the lead rounded the bend, those in them saw that indeed the old mill had been renovated, but that the flame they had seen had come, not from the old mill, but from a small bonfire started farther in the woods.

And that was not all. What made them catch their breath and signal for silence, was the figure of a man bent close to the flickering fire, intent upon deciphering the writing on a long piece of paper, that looked suspiciously like an official document.

So silent had been their approach that the man

had not even changed his position. Luckily the canoes were screened by heavy, overhanging branches of trees, so that the occupants could observe without being observed.

Silently the other two canoes joined them, and noiselessly, scarcely daring to breathe, the young folks watched.

CHAPTER V

A SHOT IN THE DARK

In the minds of each of the young people in the canoes, one word kept repeating itself over and over again: "Spy, spy, spy!"

Since the war had begun, the country had been overrun with them, that they knew; but out here on this remote island . . . Yet there was something about the very posture of the man, his hunched-up figure, the nervous twitching of the fingers that held the document, that branded him.

As they watched, he started to fold up the paper, glancing stealthily about meanwhile; then, as though satisfied that no one was watching, he picked up the heavy bag that lay beside him, evidently preparing for flight.

Betty, a little tense figure in the bottom of the boat, uttered a gasp of dismay, as Allen began carefully to lower himself into the shallow water.

The man on shore heard the slight sound and turned swiftly, staring suspiciously into the thick

shadows of the foliage. Then did the boys and girls literally hold their breath.

After a few seconds, which seemed an eternity to the taut nerves of the watchers, the man turned with a guttural growl, and started cautiously to make off into the denser woodland beyond.

In a second, Allen was out of the boat, and lending a hand to the gallant Little Captain, who would not be outdone in any adventure, no matter how perilous.

The other boys and girls followed, silent as ghosts, their training in woodcraft standing them in good stead. For an instant, they stood in a tense, excited group on shore, Mrs. Irving in their midst.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," Allen was saying, and they had to lean close to catch the words, which were barely above a whisper. "There must be a guard around this mill somewhere. We'll get him, and head that fellow off."

"I'll take you to a guard," said Will suddenly. "We'll find him at the other end of the mill."

Without another word, he turned and led the way, careful of the betraying snap of twigs, along the shore, toward the mill. Even in that moment of tense excitement, the girls and boys looked at his suddenly stiffened back in surprise. It was the first time since he had come ashore that

morning, that his comrades had been able to discover anything of the old Will.

However, they had little time for the solving of riddles. There was work to be done, work, which in these stirring times, might perhaps help to make history.

As they neared the mill, Will motioned to them to stay where they were, and ran ahead to intercept a guard. A moment later he returned with the latter, and the whole party made its way hurriedly and stealthily in a roundabout direction, which would almost certainly intercept the spy—if spy he were.

"Oh, Betty," whispered Grace, close to the Little Captain's ear. "I've always been horribly afraid of spies. Do you suppose he's got a gun?"

"I never heard of a spy that didn't," returned Betty grimly. "But don't worry—we have one, too."

"Better not talk," warned Roy, close at their side. "A whisper may mean a bullet."

Grace almost screamed, but Betty's firm little hand across her mouth smothered it into something between a sob and a squeak.

"Hush," whispered Betty fiercely. "You'll spoil everything."

At that moment, the sharp crack of a twig somewhere to the left of them in the woods, made

them stop suddenly and stand motionless, listening.

Then with a shout, Will rushed forward, followed by the other boys and the home guard man.

"Hands up!" shouted the latter, leveling his pistol at something that moved among the bushes. "Stand where you are."

Like a flash of lightning the man wriggled out from his cover, and made a dash for liberty. With a yell, the guard ran forward, firing as he went, with the boys close at his heels.

"Oh, oh, they'll get shot!" wailed Amy, her hands before her face. "I don't see why we couldn't have left the old thing alone, anyway."

"That's a nice thing to say!" cried Mollie, trembling with excitement. "Is that your idea of patriotism, to let a spy get away right under our very noses?"

"It's a good deal better than having the boys shot right under our very noses," retorted Amy with spirit.

"We'll be lucky if we don't get shot ourselves," said Grace, almost in hysterics. "Oh, there goes another one. I wonder who got shot that time."

"Let's go and see," said Betty, pale, but determined. "It isn't like us to stand in the background, when there may be something to do."

"But, Betty," wailed Amy, "we may get shot."

"Well, then, we shall," cried Betty, turning upon her fiercely. "That may have been the spy that was shot, or it may be one of our boys. Are we going to stay here, or are we going to find out?"

"I—I'm sorry, Betty," quavered poor Amy. "Of course, we'll go."

Without another word the Little Captain turned and, with Mollie at her side, made off in the direction the boys had taken. Amy and Grace, arms entwined about each other, followed a little lingeringly in the rear of their bolder companions.

They had not gone far, when they heard the welcome sound of masculine voices in excited altercation, and the heavy tramp of feet coming toward them.

"Oh," sighed Betty, her lip quivering, now that the need of courage had passed, "they never sounded so good to me before."

"Thank heaven you're safe," cried Allen, while relief banished the fear in his eyes. "I don't know what we could have been thinking of, to leave you all alone——"

"But did you get him?" cried Mollie impatiently.

"No, worse luck," responded Will disgustedly, while the guard mopped his perspiring forehead.

"That spy was a slippery customer. We did get something out of it, though."

"What?" they cried eagerly.

"This," said Will, holding up something that gleamed white in the moonlight. "It's a letter, and it ought to tell us a number of things we want to know about Mr. Adolph Hensler."

"Oh, is that his name?" cried Betty eagerly. "That tells us a good deal without even opening the letter."

"It's German enough," agreed Will. "But, gee! I'm sorry we didn't catch the fellow. The government needs him."

"But we're so glad you didn't get shot," Amy ventured mildly. "We heard that last one back there in the woods, and we thought——"

"We'd gotten ours?" grinned Roy. "Well, we hadn't—not yet."

"It was too near for comfort, just the same," Frank added. "I could almost hear the wind from it as it whizzed past me."

Here Betty, who had been watching Allen closely, uttered a sharp exclamation, and all turned to her.

"Allen," she cried, for he had swayed a little and rested his hand against a tree as though to steady himself, "why didn't you tell us? Oh, Allen! It's blood!"

"Nothing at all," said Allen, laughing a little unsteadily, as Mrs. Irving and the girls and boys gathered about him anxiously. "A little thing will bleed like a shambles sometimes. It's nothing —Betty——"

But Betty, with a little catch in her breath, was tearing aside the soft shirt, which was clotted with blood at the shoulder.

"Oh, Allen, Allen!" she was murmuring over and over in a way that sent the blood pounding madly to Allen Washburn's head, and made the wound a blessing. "Why didn't you tell me? Oh, your poor shoulder! Some one get some water, quick," she ordered imperiously, turning to the anxious group. "I don't think it's serious, but we must stop this bleeding. Please hurry."

And hurry they did, bringing water from a near-by spring in cups they expertly improvised from leaves as they had done so many times just for the fun of it.

Then the boys produced some spotless white handkerchiefs, which served as a makeshift bandage, till they could reach the cottage. The bullet, as Betty had said, had not much more than grazed the shoulder, yet the wound had bled profusely, and Allen was beginning to feel a little sick and dizzy, from the loss of blood.

When at last all had been done, that it was

possible to do, Allen was helped down to the canoe, and they paddled home, a very much sobered group of young people.

"Never mind," said Allen, in an attempt to lift the general depression, as they neared the cottage. "We found the letter anyway, which may be of considerable help to the government. And what's one shoulder more or less in the cause?"

CHAPTER VI

MOONLIGHT AND MYSTERY

THE moon made a rippling path of silver upon the water, a soft wind whispered drowsily through the trees, and far off in the depths of the woodland, an owl hooted plaintively. Ordinarily, the romantic paddle back to the island would have been filled with delight for the Outdoor Girls and their four boy friends, but tonight the profuse beauty all about them passed unnoticed.

Betty, sitting beside Allen in the bottom of the canoe, while Frank and Grace paddled, was very pale and silent. However, the others talked enough to make up for her silence.

"What do you suppose is in the letter?" said Mollie, for perhaps the hundredth time.

"How do you suppose we know?" responded Will, exasperated. "We can't very well read it until we get home; and then perhaps there won't be anything important in it. Gee, if we'd only gotten that fellow!"

"Well, it's of no use to cry over spilled milk," said Frank philosophically. "We were mighty lucky to get the letter. Allen's the only one that ought to kick—he got the rough end of the deal."

"Yes," said Betty fiercely; "and we ought to get that man for shooting him. The coward!"

Allen laughed softly, and put a hand over Betty's little clenched one.

"I don't suppose he meant to shoot me, especially," he said. "It was my fault for getting in the way of the bullet."

"Yes, that's a mighty bad habit to get into," remarked Roy dryly, "especially in these times, when we're more than likely to get a chance to exercise it."

"Ooh!" squealed Amy, giving a sudden splash with her paddle, that sent a geyser of spray all about her, causing several loud protests. "I wish you'd stop talking about such things. I'd like to stop shivering for about five minutes."

The girls giggled hysterically and felt more natural.

"Goodness," sighed Grace, after five minutes of silence, during which each had been busy with his or her own thoughts. "This paddle never seemed so long to me before."

"Thanks," said Frank. "May I ask whether you are referring to the company?"

"I wasn't even thinking of the company," retorted Grace ungraciously.

"Gee, we must be impressive," murmured Roy. "She doesn't even know we're around."

"Stop paddling, Frank," suggested Mollie maliciously, "and see how soon she'd know you weren't around."

Obediently Frank drew his paddle from the water, and Grace, who had only been making a pretense of doing her share, looked around indignantly.

"Well, you can't expect me to do it all," she said, and with a sigh of utter resignation, Frank resumed his work.

"Say, fellows," he said, "isn't that just like a girl?"

"What's that?" cried Amy suddenly, making them jump nervously.

"What?" queried Grace in a voice scarcely above a whisper, while the rest looked for an explanation from Amy to the shadowy woodland and back again.

"It—it was a noise," explained Amy, incoherently, "like a man moving, and I was sure—I—saw a—couple of eyes watching us——"

"For heaven's sake!" cried Allen, raising himself suddenly in the canoe, "put on more steam, you fellows! We've got to get the girls out of

this. What do you say, Mrs. Irving?" turning to their chaperon, who had been a silent spectator until the moment.

"By all means," she said decisively. "We can face these mysteries better by daylight, and we've had enough excitement for one night."

So they all paddled hard while the girls' eyes remained fixed in half-fearful, half-hopeful expectation upon the shadowy shore. For these girls were outdoor girls, and adventure was the breath of life to them.

However, nothing else happened to disturb the calm of a perfect summer night, and a few minutes later they landed at the pier, and hastily fastened the canoes.

"Now for a light and the contents of that letter," cried Will, his eyes gleaming with anticipation. "We'll soon find out whether Mr. Adolph Hensler was a regular, honest-to-goodness spy, or just an impostor. How about it, Allen?" he went on, as the latter stumbled over a stone, and Will hooked an arm through his. "Feeling pretty much all in, are you?"

"A little unsteady on my pins, as our friend Captain Kidd would say," Allen replied, though his lips were set with the effort to walk steadily. "It's funny what a little scratch will do to a fellow."

"It wasn't such a little scratch, old man," said Will soberly. "If it had hit you more directly, you'd have been in for a pretty long siege. As it is, I'm afraid you'll have to lie low for a week or so. Here we are. Now, just a couple of steps, old fellow——"

Allen was, in truth, weaker than he thought, for each step seemed mountains high, and Frank had to grasp his other arm, before they finally made the floor of the porch, and succeeded in getting him across the threshold.

"Never mind," whispered Mollie, slipping a comforting arm about Betty's shoulders as they followed slowly. "He isn't hurt seriously, dear, and by to-morrow he'll be feeling all right again."

"I know," said Betty, a little catch in her breath. "It isn't so bad now, but I was just thinking what it would be like, if he were wounded on the battlefield, with no one to look after him—and—and——"

"Oh, Betty, we just mustn't think of things like that!" said Mollie, her voice quivering. "No matter how we feel, we've just got to keep on smiling for the boys' sake."

"I know," said Betty, straightening up with a pathetic little attempt at a smile. "We'll all have to say like the little boy that fell down and hurt himself, 'I'm not cryin'; I'm laughin'.' Yes, we're

coming." This last was interpolated by way of encouragement to Frank, who had been sent back to look for them.

They found Allen propped up in a huge armchair before a fire, which had been hastily laid in the grate, looking rather pale and wan, but tremendously interested in the proceedings, nevertheless.

"Betty," he said pleadingly, stretching out a hand to her.

Without a word she went over to him, taking it in both her own.

"I don't want you to go out of my sight," he whispered, while the others thoughtfully looked the other way. "My shoulder doesn't ache when you're around," he added whimsically, knowing how clearly Betty saw through him; "but when you go away, the ache in it is—fiendish!"

"I won't go away," Betty promised, touching the bandaged shoulder gently.

"Never?" he queried eagerly, twisting around so he could see her face. "Is that a promise, Betty?"

"While your shoulder hurts," she added quickly, while the color, which did not come from the fire, flooded her face. "I—I hate to be cross with you when you're not feeling well," she added, trying to be severe, "but if you don't stop

WILL LEANED FORWARD, REGARDING THE PAPER CLOSELY.

—looking at me—Allen . . . See, they're waiting to read the letter!"

"Does that mean I have to stop looking at you?" queried Allen, with a smile. "Oh, well, I'll not complain, if you'll only keep on holding my hand, Betty. I'd have a chronic bullet wound all the rest of my life——"

"Well, when the invalid and hero of the occasion is ready," Will broke in, his patience at an end, "we should be pleased to read a document, which probably will seem dull and uninteresting to him beside what he has to say——"

"Oh, Will, please don't talk so much," cried Grace. "If you don't hurry I'll be so sleepy it wouldn't bother me if Adolph Hensler turned out to be the Kaiser himself."

"Yes, speed up, old man," Roy added. "Expectation may be better than realization, but I don't believe it."

"Well," said Will, opening the letter which had not been sealed, with exasperating deliberation, "we shall see—what we shall see."

He leaned forward, regarding the paper closely in the yellow lamplight, while the others crowded eagerly about him.

"Well—what-do-you-know-about-that!" he said slowly, pushing the paper from him disgustedly. "All in code—and a code that will need an ex-

pert to figure it out. Gee, that's a mean trick, that is!"

Frank picked up the paper and pored over it for a moment, while the rest watched him anxiously.

"Yes, that's a stiff one," he said at last. "I guess there's no use in our wasting time over it."

"It proves one thing anyway," put in Allen, from his corner. "The paper is important, and our friend to-night is undoubtedly what we thought he was."

"Much good that does us," said Will, morosely folding the paper and stuffing it carefully into his pocket. "Of course, it's better than nothing, and we'll get it into official hands just as soon as we can; but we certainly ought to have caught that rascal."

"Say!" exclaimed Roy suddenly, his eyes gleaming with the light of adventure, "maybe it isn't too late yet. Unless Adolph, the spy, had a boat or swam to the nearest island, which is more than a mile away, he's still on this island somewhere. We've got our good old trusties over in the big tent, and there's a bare chance we might be able to round him up."

"No, you don't!" said Grace decidedly, while all the girls looked startled. "You're going to use your guns to keep that man away from here. Do

you suppose we're going to lie awake all night listening for shots?"

"Oh, all right," said Roy, "I'm properly squelched."

"Let's go to bed," yawned Grace, "I'm dying by inches. And, oh, Mollie, dear, don't forget to bring the candy box!"

Half an hour later the lights in the little cottage were out and the boys, all except Allen, who had been made as comfortable as possible in the house, were taking turns at standing guard outside.

Despite the quiet beauty and peace of the night, the girls found it almost impossible to sleep. They tossed and dozed, and waked and dozed again until, toward daylight, they fell into a restless, uneasy sleep.

CHAPTER VII

ROBBED

CRACK! Crack!

The girls started to a sitting posture and regarded each other fearfully.

"What is it?" cried Mollie, her eyes big and round in the semi-dark. "Betty, what are you doing?"

"That was a shot," responded Betty, her voice quivering with excitement. "I've been listening for it all night. Who's coming——"

"Oh, dear!" wailed Amy. "I knew some one would get killed! It's worse than some awful nightmare."

But Betty was already running from the room, with Mollie close at her heels. Reluctantly, Grace and Amy slipped on their robes and slippers and followed.

Betty almost ran into Mrs. Irving on the landing, and gasped an apology.

"Oh, dear, what do you suppose it is?" she panted, as they went on down the stairs together. "If another of the boys is hurt——"

But at that moment the boys themselves came bursting in upon them, rumpled, sheepish and out of temper, to confront the excited girls in the lower hall.

"What do you know about that?" cried Roy disgustedly. "If I'm not the biggest fool that ever lived, I'll eat my hat."

"Far be it from me to stop you," growled Will. "He must have passed near enough to touch you, and you let him get away."

"Well, you needn't rub it in," retorted Roy, turning upon him savagely, while the girls looked from one to the other uncomprehendingly. "You ought to know I'm sore enough without having you find fault."

"Cut it out, fellows," Frank put in peaceably. "It wasn't anybody's fault; just hard luck, that's all."

"But what?" Mollie interrupted impatiently. "What happened?"

"Well, you see it was like this," began Will, still in a bad temper. "We fellows decided that our friend, Adolph Hensler, might have some mistaken longings for the code letter he dropped, and might follow us and try to steal it back. So we thought we'd set a trap for him by keeping watch, turn and turn about, in such a position that he couldn't possibly see us."

"Yes, and that's about all," Roy, speaking bitterly, took the story away from Will, "except that it was yours truly's turn at sentry duty, and he went to sleep, leaving Adolph a clear field."

"And did he really come back?" asked Betty, glancing apprehensively over her shoulder as though she was afraid the rascal might be close at hand.

"Yes, he really did," said Roy, still bitterly. "And if I hadn't happened to see him coming out of the window——"

"Out of the window!" echoed Grace, who, with Amy, had decided that the lower hall with company was more to be desired than a room upstairs alone. "Oh, Roy, from this house?"

"Since this is the only one for three miles around, I suppose it was," said Roy, with biting sarcasm.

"But he may have been in our room," cried Amy, beginning to shiver again.

"Very likely," said Will grimly, while Mrs. Irving looked decidedly worried. "The one good thing about the whole affair is, that he didn't get the letter."

"Oh, bother the letter," cried Mollie, cross because she could not stop trembling. "I—I wish it were daylight. I never wanted to see the sun so much."

"Well, it is, almost," said Frank, waving his hand toward the east where a dim grey veil was replacing the blackness of night. "Adolph must have been hanging around for some time, before he got the chance he wanted."

"Before I went to sleep," put in Roy moodily.

"But didn't you follow him?" queried Betty eagerly.

"Of course," said Will, "until he disappeared in the woods; and you might just as well hunt for a needle in a haystack, as look for him there. Besides, we wanted to see if you girls were all right."

"Well, we're not," said Grace dispiritedly. "We didn't have half enough sleep, and now we've been scared to death for the second time in one night."

"Well," said Mrs. Irving, coming out of a brown study, and speaking decidedly. "There's nothing to be gained by standing here. Probably none of us will be able to sleep any more to-night, but we can at least get dressed. Come, girls, we don't want to add sickness to our problems."

"This time we're all going to watch," Will called after them, as they started up the stairs. "If Adolph comes back again, he won't get away so easily."

Slowly the girls reëntered their room, and

were relieved to find that the long night with all its weird suggestions and imaginings, was really over. Beds and dressers were distinctly visible in the faint grey light that filtered into the room. Soon the sun would be up.

"Oh, I'm so tired," sighed Mollie, sinking down on the edge of her bed and gazing about her disconsolately. "I feel as if I ought to be tremendously excited, but I'm too sleepy to care much about anything."

"Wait till the sun comes up," said Betty, recovering a little of her old cheeriness. "That makes everything look different. I wonder," she added, as if the thought had not been in her mind all the time, "how Allen is. The noise didn't even seem to disturb him. I think I'll ask Mrs. Irving if I can go—and—see——"

"Why, of course you can," said Mrs. Irving, who happened to be passing the door at that particular minute, and looking in at her smilingly. "I was just going to visit the patient myself; so if you hurry and get dressed, we can go together."

It is safe to say that Betty was fully dressed, to the last little pattings and fluffings of her blue morning dress, before ten minutes was up, and, with Mrs. Irving, was walking with rapidly beating heart down the hall toward Allen's room.

The door had been left open in case he needed anything during the night, and now his voice greeted them before they reached it.

"Hello," it called imperatively. "I want to know something."

"All right," said Mrs. Irving sunnily, pushing the door open and advancing toward the patient, while Betty lingered a little in the background. "You're not the only one. How are you feeling this morning?"

"All right—fine," he amended, as his eager eye caught sight of Betty. "Never was feeling better in my life. Decidedly grateful for being allowed to live at all—when there are so many beautiful things to look at," this with so direct and ardent a gaze upon Betty, that she turned and looked out of the window, unwilling to let him see what her face must reveal.

Mrs. Irving laughed a little and began to adjust his pillows carefully.

"We are going to have a doctor for you today," she announced, and Allen sat up in bed with a jerk.

"What for?" he demanded. "I don't need any doctor. I'm feeling all right now, and ten to one, he'd make me sick. They always do. Please don't bring one of them in here."

"Don't make a fuss and get excited, please,"

Mrs. Irving cautioned him gently, while her eyes dwelt with humorous sympathy upon Betty's back. "I'm going down to prepare some breakfast, and perhaps Betty can persuade you about the doctor."

Before either of them realized it, she was gone, leaving them alone. Still Betty forgot to turn round.

For several minutes, Allen lay and regarded her contentedly. Then he gave a mountainous sigh, and finally:

"What have I done?" he queried pathetically. "It's one of the prettiest backs I ever saw, but that's no reason why I should have to look at it all the time. Besides, you seem to forget that I have a sore shoulder."

Betty turned to him swiftly, half laughing and half grave.

"I never know when to believe you," she said, coming toward him slowly and moving a chair up to the edge of the bed. "You see, that's the worst of having a bad reputation."

"I haven't," he denied stoutly, feeling for her hand, which, however, persisted in evading his. "I've never said anything to you, Betty Nelson, that wasn't true. If you'll give me your hand, my shoulder will stop aching."

Betty laughed whimsically.

"And you said you never had told me anything that wasn't true," she reminded him.

"I repeat it," he answered doggedly, succeeding at last in finding her hand, and holding it tight. "Just being near you makes me so happy, I haven't time to think of pain."

"D—did you hear all the noise just a little while ago?" stammered Betty hastily. "You must have wondered what it was all about."

"I did," he replied, still with his eyes on her face. "I started to get out of bed and see for myself, only I found I was kind of wabbly, and thought better of it. What——"

"Oh, Betty!" Mollie flung wide the door and burst in upon them. "Excuse me, but I had to tell you. What do you suppose has happened now?"

She sank down on the edge of the bed, and looked at them despairingly.

"Well, what?" asked Betty impatiently. "Has anybody else been shot or——"

"Goodness, it's worse than that!" cried Mollie hysterically. "You know, we've never bothered to lock up our good things, because there never seemed any danger at all of robbery on Pine Island——"

"Yes, yes," cried Betty, fairly wild with impatience. "I know all that. Tell me, what happened?"

"Well," said Mollie, refusing to be hurried, "we thought of our jewelry, looked for it—and it was——"

"Gone!" cried Betty, reading the answer in Mollie's face. "Oh, Mollie, my pin and my bracelet——"

"Yes, and my gold watch, and Grace's pearl lavallière, and goodness knows how many other things," Mollie finished, in the calmness of despair.

"And of course, it was that spy that did it!" cried Betty. "Now, we've got to catch him!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE BIG GAME

Betty opened her eyes slowly, and blinked at the sunlight that flooded the room. She had a vague sort of idea that something unusual was going to happen, but was too lazy and comfortable to realize just what that something was.

Then suddenly it came to her, and she sat up in bed with a start. They were going home! That was the big event; and somehow, she did not feel as sorry as she usually did at the end of a vacation. In fact, she was almost eager to leave this island, with its powder mills and spies that shot boys you liked, and robbed you in the bargain—quite eager to drop play, and do her bit for the country she loved.

"Betty, what are you doing awake so early?" queried Grace petulantly. "If you can't sleep you might lie still, and let me."

"Have some candy, Gracie," Betty invited, pulling the empty candy box from the table beside

the bed, and handing it to her friend. "It may help your disposition."

"Goodness, what it is to have a reputation!" said Grace plaintively. "People think they can insult and slight me, and then make it all up by handing me a bon-bon!"

"Not guilty," laughed Betty merrily. "If you'll look a little closer, you'll see there is not a bit of candy in that box! No, don't glare at me like that, Gracie, dear. The only way you could frighten me, would be by getting up early. Then I'd know there was something wrong."

"So would I," said Grace, stifling a yawn. "I'm altogether too good-natured to frighten anybody —even myself."

"Well, you can stay there all day if you want to," said Betty, inserting two determined little feet into two pretty bedroom slippers, and running across to the open window, "but I wouldn't if I were you. It's too wonderful a day in the first place, and in the second, I can imagine pleasanter things than staying alone on this island over night."

"Oh, that's so!" cried Grace, sitting up and staring at Betty. "I forgot we were going home to-day. Oh, dear, now I will have to get up."

"How awful," mocked Mollie, who had been watching them for some time from the bed in

the alcove. "It's an outrage, having to get up in the morning. I think we should have been made so we could sleep all the time."

"Just my idea," Grace was beginning, unmoved, when Mrs. Irving's voice sounded at the door.

"Seven o'clock," she announced cheerily. "And you know we decided to get an early start."

For the next hour all was hurry and excitement while four girlish tongues clattered unceasingly.

"Have you fully decided to join the Red Cross, Betty?" queried Amy.

"Why, of course. Haven't you?" asked the Little Captain, slipping on the skirt to her pretty traveling suit and fastening it deftly. "I'm going to make dozens and dozens of scarfs, sweaters and socks. The boys are giving up everything for us, and I'm sure the least we can do is, keep them warm."

"Oh, I can't wait to begin," cried Mollie. "I'm so excited all the time about the war and everything, I can't sit still——"

"You've got to, if you're going to knit," grumbled Grace. "And you can't eat candy, either, Mollie Billette."

"Oh, look who's talking," crowed Mollie. "If that's true, and the poor soldiers had to depend

upon you to keep them warm, I'd feel sorry for them, that's all."

"Oh, I don't know," defended Betty, putting an arm about Grace, and starting for the door. "Grace believes in quality more than quantity. She may not knit as much as the rest of us, but she does it twice as well."

Grace laughed and hugged her friend as they ran down the stairs together.

"That's worth my lavallière, Betty," she said. "If Adolph Hensler hadn't gotten it first, I'd will it to you!"

They flew around to prepare breakfast, and the smell of sizzling bacon and baking biscuits sent their spirits soaring to the skies. The boys, who had finished their own breakfast, and scoured up the pans, heard the sounds of merriment, and came to inquire the cause.

Betty saw them first and laughingly bade them enter.

"We'd ask you to breakfast," she said, "only this is the last biscuit, and I wouldn't give it up to my best friend. Why don't you come in?" she continued, as they lingered on the threshold. "I never knew you to be bashful before."

"We're not bashful," denied Allen, as they distributed themselves about the room in various and characteristic attitudes, grinning happily at the

girls. "We were so hypnotized by the charming picture you made for us we couldn't move, that's all."

"I told you there weren't any more biscuits," said Betty decidedly.

"Goodness, I'm glad somebody else has a bad reputation besides me," said Grace languidly. "At least you don't have anything to live up to."

"How is the shoulder this morning?" Mrs. Irving inquired of Allen. "You haven't taken the bandage off, have you?"

"Not yet," replied Allen, who, although it was scarcely a week since the accident, had almost completely recovered from his wound. "The doctor said he'd be around early this morning, and if it looked all right, would take it off."

"Gee, but I feel funny this morning," announced Roy, apropos of nothing in particular.

"You look it," murmured Mollie, pouring herself another cup of coffee.

"What do you mean—funny?" queried Frank with interest, while Roy favored Mollie with a hurt look.

"Oh, I don't know how to explain it," said Roy, blushing, as all eyes were turned upon him. "Just sort of excited and—er—queer."

"Yes, we heard you the first time," said Mollie patiently, while Roy looked about for help.

"I know what you mean," said Allen, coming to his rescue. "You're thinking that we're likely to be called almost any time now, and it gives you stage fright to think about it. It's a great big task we've taken hold of, and we can't quite grasp it yet, that's all."

"Th-that's the way I feel," said Betty, her eyes shining and her cheeks flushed, stammering in her eagerness. "I feel somehow as if we were acting in a great big play, where there are all actors and no audience, and everybody's sort of flustered and excited and not sure just where they belong but terribly anxious to get into it somewhere."

"Well, we're all in it," cried Frank, his eyes fired with enthusiasm. "Thank heaven, there's not one among us we can call a slacker. We've all enlisted without waiting to be hauled into it by the scruff of the neck—we—we——," his eyes happened to fall upon Will as he sat regarding him steadily from a chair near the window, and as though at a signal, his enthusiasm died and he stammered incoherently.

"Well, we know what *we're* going to do," said Betty, hurriedly changing the subject. "As soon as we reach town we're going to hunt up the nearest Red Cross headquarters and join."

"Bully!" cried Roy admiringly. "I heard a fel-

low saying the other day that it was wonderful the way the American women have come up to the scratch—pardon the slang, ladies, but that's what he said. He said the Red Cross was turning out bushels of woolen wear, and that at this rate there wouldn't be a man in the United States army or navy, that wouldn't be kept warm and comfortable during the big fight. I tell you it makes you feel good, to think that mothers and sisters and sweet girl friends are backing you up like that. It takes away old Fritz's last shadow of a chance."

"Oh, it's wonderful to hear you talk like that," said Mollie, eyes bright and cheeks glowing. "Ever since war was declared I've been dying to put on a uniform and get into the thick of it myself. But if we can't, it's the next best thing to be able to encourage our boys, and make them as comfortable and happy as we can. Oh, I think they're wonderful—and I love them all, every one of them!"

"Hold on, hold on!" cried Roy, while the other boys looked delighted. "It's all right for you to love me, but why take the whole army into it? It would be much more exclusive the other way."

"I love them all," said Mollie stubbornly. "And I'll keep on loving them till this awful war is over. Then I'll consent to be exclusive."

"Is that a promise?" cried Roy, while the others laughed delightedly.

"But I didn't mean what you mean," protested Mollie, flushing vividly. "Oh, dear, why does everybody have to be so foolish?"

"I call upon the others to witness," said Roy, jumping to his feet and bringing his fist down upon the table, with a force that made them jump. "Mollie has consented to be exclusive when the war's over, and you all know what that means."

"Better get it in writing," Allen suggested. "That's the only safe way."

"And that isn't," said Mollie, recovering.

"Well, we'll see what we shall see," said Roy, sitting down again, rebuffed but undaunted.

"Gee, it'll be up to Roy to end the war in a hurry now," grinned Frank. "If we don't look out, he'll be starting some peace trip, and getting his name in all the papers."

"Nothing doing," said Roy decidedly. "When I deal with old Fritz, it will be with a gun!"

"So say we all of us," cried Allen, his eyes kindling. "I tell you, it won't take us long, when we really begin to get our troops over there. I'm crazy to get into it."

"So am I," cried Betty, getting up energetically and beginning to clear away the dishes. "And the first thing to do is to get back to town where

we can really start something. Goodness, I wish these dishes were washed."

"If all your wishes were granted so quickly," smiled Mrs. Irving, as the other girls went at the task with equal vigor, "you wouldn't have anything to worry about."

Two hours later the campers were standing on the deck of the ridiculous little ferryboat, that still plied between Pine Island and the mainland, looking with mingled emotions toward the spot where they had spent so many pleasant hours.

"Do you remember," Amy said thoughtfully, as the girls stood in a group in the bow of the boat, "how sorry we were to leave the island that other summer? And now——"

"We're almost glad," finished Grace.

"We're glad because we're going to do our share in the biggest thing that ever happened to this world," said Betty tensely. "We're glad because we've got the greatest country in the world, and are going to do our best to keep it the greatest country in the world. We're glad, most of all, because—we're Americans!"

CHAPTER IX

GAY CONSPIRATORS

"It's all right," Mollie was saying, "to give our time and labor and everything like that, but the Red Cross needs money. If we could only find some way to raise it!"

The four girls were seated on the porch of Betty's house in Deepdale, busy as always, with their knitting. Mollie and Betty were swaying gently in the big porch swing, while Grace and Amy were curled up comfortably in roomy wicker armchairs.

The weather was perfect—a typical fall day, with the brilliant sunshine peeping in under the edge of the awning, creeping up almost to the feet of the girls, while vagrant breezes, spicy and pungent with the smell of burning leaves, fanned their faces, and stirred them to a new restlessness, a new desire for action.

"Well, why not?" asked Betty, putting down her knitting, and looking from one to the other. "I don't see why it should be impossible for us to raise money."

"Betty, have you a plan?" asked Amy, gazing hopefully toward the Little Captain. "I've thought of all sorts of things, from taking a course in stenography to taking in washing, but nothing seems to be just right, somehow."

"Goodness, I should think not," said Grace, while Betty and Mollie giggled happily. "I can't imagine you in the rôle of chief washerwoman to Deepdale, Amy; and as for stenography—think how much you would have to spend before you began to earn any money."

"My idea's very much simpler than either of those," said Betty demurely. "I thought—though of course it may not be possible, at all—that we might give a lawn fête and charge fifty cents admission, a person. We know pretty nearly everybody in Deepdale, and if only a third of them came we'd raise quite a big sum."

"Betty, that's splendid," cried Mollie, clapping her hands excitedly, forgetful of the needles she still held. "We can have fortune-telling booths and tableaux, and perhaps a sketch of some kind. Oh, won't it be fun?"

"It ought to be," said Grace conservatively, starting to wind another skein of wool. "But if we have all those things I think we ought to charge a dollar."

"Goodness, I don't think they'd get their

money's worth," smiled Betty whimsically. "A dollar's rather a lot of money to pay for a lawn party."

"Well, they ought to be willing to give something, just for the sake of patriotism," said Amy quietly—for there was no better patriot in all of Deepdale than Amy.

"Yes, but don't you see, we want to give them their money's worth," Mollie argued excitedly. "Because then we'll feel we've really earned whatever we raise."

"Well, we will earn it," said Betty earnestly. "We have, as Doctor Morely says, 'a good deal of local talent' that we ought to be able to win over to our side, and if we really go into the thing to make it a success, it will be one. And a successful lawn party is no end of fun."

"Goodness, you've got me so excited, I can't wait to begin," cried Mollie, waving her needles about in a way to endanger seriously Betty's eyesight. "I want to start something."

"If you don't stop poking me with those needles, you will start something," threatened Betty, moving to the opposite corner of the swing, and as far from danger as possible. "You wouldn't need a bayonet in the trenches, Mollie dear. The whole German army would drop dead, if they saw you moving down upon them with

a knitting needle. Stop it, I tell you, or I shall be forced to take them away from you."

"Oh, look who's going to take them away," mocked Mollie, continuing her wild dabs and dashes. "There isn't a man, much less a woman, on this earth could take these knitting needles away from me, against my will."

"Looks as if I'd have to start a little war of my own," remarked Betty ruefully, carefully putting away her own knitting and preparing for action. "I never yet let a challenge like that pass me by—Oh, Allen, you startled me!"

"Sorry," said Allen, making his usual, though undignified, entrance over the railing of the porch, and seating himself with a sigh of content in one of the big chairs. "Say, what was all the row about?" he added, looking with interest at Mollie's still threatening needles, and Betty's general air of preparation for attack. "About a mile away I heard the noise, and thought I'd drop in to see who was getting killed."

"A mile away," sniffed Mollie, abandoning the attack, while Betty once more opened her knitting bag. "If girls are good fibbers I wonder what they'd call men."

"Li—I mean prevaricators," said Allen cheerfully, and the girls gasped in dismay. "Well, you asked me, didn't you?" he argued, laughing at

their shocked faces. "I only tried to be obliging."

"Then we like you better when you're not," said Betty primly.

"But what was the row?" he persisted. "I'm sure I interrupted something, and if I'm still intruding, I'll go away so you can finish it."

"Oh, we were just starting a new kind of war," Mollie explained. "We call it the war of the knitting needles."

"That's just what I told the fellows," said Allen, shaking his head sorrowfully, "only they wouldn't believe me."

"Now what are you talking about?" asked Grace, without looking up from her knitting. "I know you want somebody to ask it, so I'll be—as you would say in vulgar slang—the goat."

"That's right! Blame it all, even the slang, on us," said Allen plaintively. "That's the way the girls——"

"Goodness, you can't tell us anything about ourselves we don't know," said Mollie impatiently. "We want to know what you told the boys."

"Oh, about the needles," said Allen, stretching out his long legs, and locking his fingers behind his head. "I just happened to remark that while we were killing each other off with bayonets in the trenches, the women and girls would be knit-

ting themselves to death at home, so there would probably be an equal number of both sexes when the war was over."

"Oh, dear, there you go, joking about it again," sighed Amy. "And you made me lose a stitch too. Oh, dear, that's the first one in the whole sweater."

"Hand it over," said Betty patiently. "I may be able to catch it for you, so you won't have to rip out too much. Oh, Allen, what do you suppose we are going to do?"

"What?" queried Allen, gazing admiringly from the busy deft fingers to the pretty bent head.

"We're going to give a lawn party," she answered. "It's going to be as elaborate an affair as possible, and we're going to charge a dollar admission."

"Whew," said Allen, sitting up and regarding each one of the flushed conspirators in turn. "What's this—a get-rich-quick-scheme?"

"I should say not!" said Mollie hotly. "Isn't that just exactly like a man? *Everything* we do isn't selfish."

"Well, what *is* the idea?" asked poor Allen patiently. "If you'd just tell a fellow——"

"It's for the Red Cross," Betty explained. "I'm afraid that stitch is too far down to get back, Amy dear. You'll have to rip out a little. You

see we want to raise a lot of money," she went on, raising her pretty head and speaking quickly. "When we decided to join the Red Cross, as you know we have, we didn't mean to go into it half way. It didn't seem to us enough, just to give our time and labor—we wanted to raise actual cash. And this seemed the best way to do it."

"I think it's a mighty fine idea," said Allen heartily. "And as I don't think there's a more patriotic town on the map than little old Deepdale, I should think you ought to be able to raise quite a considerable pile. I'll help all I can."

"Oh, Allen, will you?" cried Betty excitedly. "Oh, if you boys will only help, we'll be *sure* to make it a success. I can't wait to begin."

"Well, why do we have to wait?" asked Mollie practically. "Why can't we start in planning and rehearsing to-night?"

"There's no reason in the world why we can't," cried Betty, putting away her knitting definitely, and beginning to pace up and down the porch as she always did when thinking things out. "Allen, do you think you can round up the boys, and do you think they'll all be willing to help us?"

"Of course," said Allen, without taking his eyes from her. "I'll bring them around to-night if you say so."

"Good! Then there's Gladys Alden who plays

the violin beautifully, and Jean Ratcliffe who can recite like a professional and—oh, dear, there's no end to the talent. And we'll——" she paused dramatically and surveyed them with dancing eyes. "We'll—give a play!"

"But a play takes time," Allen objected; "and if you're counting us fellows in on it, you'll have to make it soon. We may be called any time now."

"Oh, but don't you remember that play we were going to give one time?" Mollie broke in eagerly. "And then somebody's relative was taken sick, and broke the whole thing up? That was a good little sketch, and I don't think it would take us very long to brush it up again."

"Mollie, you're a genius," cried Betty, stopping before Mollie and hugging her rapturously. "Why, of course it won't take us any time at all to get that in shape, and it's sure to take well."

"Do you know what would make a hit?" suggested Allen, catching the general spirit of enthusiasm. "If this is going to be an outdoor affair, we ought to have a big tent with a stage at one end, for this concert and sketch business. We could make it mighty picturesque, with Japanese lanterns, and we fellows might be able to rig up some batteries and electric lights for footlights."

"That would be wonderful," cried Grace,

shaken out of her usual calm. "That would be the big attraction. Then we could have little booths for fortune-telling, and such things, scattered about the place."

"And ice cream and cake counters," cried Amy, her eyes wide and dark with excitement. "We girls could make the cakes, so it wouldn't cost so much."

"Allen," interrupted Betty, gazing eagerly down the street. "There goes Roy now. Won't you go after him, and tell him to be sure to be here to-night? Frank and Will, too—don't let them say no!"

"All right," said Allen obligingly, untwining his long legs, and taking the steps two at a time. "I go to do your bidding, Princess."

"And, Allen," Betty ran down the steps to call after him, "whatever you do—come early!"

CHAPTER X

MAGIC LANTERNS

Two weeks of constant hustle, excitement and preparation passed by until at last came—the big night!

It was seven o'clock and Betty had started to dress. Mechanically, with fingers that shook a little from excitement, she went through the early stages of the process, until it was time to slip into the pretty filmy lace dress she was to wear for the first part of the evening.

Then her eyes met the reflected ones in the mirror, and she stopped short, wondering "if this were really I." She was very sure that that very pretty girl in the mirror, with the flushed cheeks and brilliant eyes, could never be the Betty Nelson she had grown up with—it could not be! And yet she thrilled with a strange new happiness. It was so good to be pretty.

Then she drew a deep breath, and turned away with a little rippling laugh at herself.

"Betty Nelson," she scolded, slipping the pretty dress over her head, and keeping her eyes severely away from the mirror, "you'll be getting conceited next; and if there's anything I hate, it's a conceited person."

At a quarter of eight there came a ring at the door bell, and Betty's heart missed a beat. It proved to be only Allen, however—but, strange as it may seem, that fact did not seem to improve the behavior of her heart in the least.

As for Allen, he simply stood and stared, as a transformed Betty ran down the stairs toward him.

"Oh, Allen, I'm *so* glad it was only you," she said, holding out her hands to him—which he seemed by no means reluctant to take. "I was so hoping you'd get here before the rest. There are one or two things I want to talk over with you."

"Betty," he whispered, his voice sounding strange, even to himself, "you're so pretty, I can't think of anything else, or look at anything else, while you're around. I always did have trouble that way, but to-night——"

"I—I'm—just the same to-night as I always am," she stammered, not daring to look at him. "Allen, dear—I——"

"What did you call me?" he shouted, turning

her about so she had to look at him. "Betty, Betty, say it again. I, oh, I——"

"I—I didn't mean it," gasped Betty, joyfully afraid, wanting to run away, yet wanting desperately not to. "I don't know what made me——"

"Don't you?" he cried, that same wild thrill in his voice. "Then I'll tell you, Betty. You said it because——"

"Good evening, Allen." It was Mrs. Nelson's voice as she came unsuspectingly upon them from the dining-room. "I didn't even know you were here. Betty and I were hoping you would get here early. The footlights don't work just as they should——" and Allen's golden hour was gone, for the moment, at least.

He gazed pleadingly toward Betty, but she had put an arm about her mother—Allen noticed with joy that it trembled a little—and was leading the way toward the rear of the house, and out upon the lawn, where the big tent had been erected.

It took Allen, who, besides being a very able and rising young lawyer, was also something of an electrician, about two minutes to find the flaw in the wiring and remedy it. Soon after that the first guests began to arrive.

The rest of the evening was one brilliant pano-

rama, that the girls never forgot. Until nine o'clock, the time set for the concert and sketch in the big tent, the guests, about two hundred in number, wandered happily about the lawn, watching "Denton's trained animals," which consisted of a little French poodle, an aristocratic yellow cat, and a gifted parrot, with an immense and varied vocabulary, perform.

The animals were the undisputed property of this young Denton, who had grown up in Deepdale, and who, being a lover of animals, had untiringly trained his pets, until their fame had spread all over the town. He had a booth all to himself, and was having more fun than the spectators—and that was saying a good deal, judging from the merry laughter and jests issuing from the tent.

There were several other attractions, the favorite, after "Denton's trained animals," being the fortune-telling booth. This was presided over by Jessie Johnson—one of the jolliest and wittiest of the Deepdale girls. She was made up to resemble an old crone, and her fortune-telling kept her victims in gales of laughter.

"Isn't it great?" cried Mollie, hugging Betty rapturously, as they met behind the scenes in the big tent about nine o'clock. "I knew it would be a success, but this is better even than I expected."

"Mollie," returned Betty, and there was a strange new thrill in her voice, that made her friend look at her quickly, "I'm happy, happy, happy! I thought I knew what it was to be happy before, but I never did. I just feel like shouting aloud and hugging everybody I see. Oh, I never dreamed we'd make such a success of it!"

"It isn't over yet, though," said Mollie, beginning to feel a little panicky. "We've got to speak *our* little piece yet, and I never did feel quite sure of that last line."

"Oh, goodness, don't begin to worry now," cried Betty. "Our last rehearsal was perfect, and we've never fallen down in anything we've tried to do yet."

"Well, there has to be a beginning to everything, hasn't there?" argued Mollie pessimistically. "I'm perfectly sure I'm going to forget that last line. I feel it coming on."

"Well, then you deserve to lose it," said Betty, knowing very well how best to handle Mollie. "You'll do just whatever you think you're going to do, and if you think you're going to fail, you'll fail!"

"I'm not going to fail any more than you are, Betty Nelson," cried Mollie, her eyes blazing. "I've never seen anything yet I couldn't do as well as you."

"Goodness, what's this?" cried gentle Amy, aghast, coming upon the two suddenly. "You're not quarreling, are you?"

"What did it sound like—talk about the weather?" asked Mollie sarcastically. "You just wait and *see* what I'll do, Betty Nelson!" and she marched out with her nose in the air.

"Oh, dear," sighed Amy; "and I thought everything was going so beautifully."

"It is," chuckled Betty, and hustled the bewildered Amy out another door of the tent.

Then came Allen, dressed as a herald of olden times, and blew in golden notes, a message to the people scattered about the lawn, that the real attraction of the evening was about to begin.

The girls had worried a little for fear the big tent would not be able to accommodate all the guests, so great had been their response to the call of patriotism, but it was found to their intense relief that, although a few had to stand at the back, all could be admitted.

The first part of the program consisted of music, recitations and some very cleverly arranged tableaux. Everything was remarkably good, as the hearty applause testified, and behind the scenes everywhere, was jubilation.

"Now if we only do as well," said Grace, as

the improvised curtain dropped, signaling the intermission, "we'll not have anything to worry about."

"We will," said Betty confidently. "Jean, you did wonderfully," she added, to the girl who had been the elocutionist of the evening. "I thought it was wonderful at the last rehearsal, but you outdid yourself to-night. And you, too, Larry. Oh, it's such a success!"

They fairly danced with impatience during the intermission, and were ready with their costumes and stage settings before the ten minutes was up.

"Oh, I'm so frightened, I can hardly stand up," chattered Amy as she and Betty stood together, waiting for the endless last minute to drag past. "Betty, if this is stage fright, it's a lot worse than I thought. I can't think of a line I have to say."

"Well, you'd better not keep that up *too* long," returned Betty grimly. "It might be serious. There, that's Allen's cue."

Local talent had even produced an orchestra for the sketch, and although once in a while, the cornetist forgot to toot, or the first violin became excited and left the rest of his flock behind to follow him as best it might, still the music was pretty good and added considerably to the general effect.

And the play was the crowning glory of the

evening! The stage fright which had threatened to overwhelm the actors, magically disappeared when they found themselves put upon their mettle, and they frolicked through the play, with an ease and naïve enjoyment that delighted their audience and brought storms of applause.

The play was called, "A Day in Court." It was a professional production which had been almost completely rewritten by Allen and Betty. The judge was a woman, and the various characters brought before her, were all more or less funny. One character had originally been a German servant girl, suing her mistress for wages, but this character, on account of the war, was changed to Irish, and was impersonated by Amy with marked success.

Betty was the woman judge, and the way she laid down the law was most marvelous, and brought forth many peals of laughter.

Will, in a most ridiculous costume, performed the offices of court clerk.

Mollie impersonated a French flower girl, who had failed to receive pay for bouquets sold to a local dude, a part played by Roy Anderson, and it developed during the court scene, that the dude was engaged to two girls at once, impersonated by Grace and another girl.

There was an irate uncle of one of the girls,

none other than Frank Haley, and Allen as the brother of the other girl, who also demanded satisfaction, and the mix-up in the courtroom was most realistic.

"About the funniest thing I ever saw in my life," was Mr. Nelson's comment.

"They are certainly doing remarkably well," answered Mrs. Billette, who chanced to sit near by.

"If those youngsters keep on doing as well as that, they'll all want to go on the professional stage," remarked Mr. Ford.

All during the ice cream and cake part of the entertainment the young performers were fêted and congratulated, till they began, as Roy expressed it, "to feel themselves some punkins."

It was late before the last guest had departed, still laughingly bandying jests back and forth, and the Little Captain and the group of her particular chums and followers were left alone. Then——

"I wish it were beginning all over again," said Amy, leaning her head against a pillar of the porch and gazing dreamily up at the stars. "I never had such a good time in my life."

"It seems to me I'm always saying that," sighed Betty, sinking into the hammock, and laughing up at Allen, as he stood before her. "It's

wonderful when life is just a succession of good times."

"Betty," he answered, sitting down beside her, and finding her hand under cover of the darkness, "that's my one ambition—to make life for you just a 'succession of good times.'"

"But I guess that never happens to anybody," she said, trying to speak lightly. "And I don't know that just having good times is a very big ambition. No—I—didn't mean that, Allen," she added quickly, seeing she had hurt him. "You've always been altogether too good to me. I—I guess I don't deserve it."

"There's nothing half good enough for you," said Allen fervently. "Betty," he added, after a slight pause, "I—I may have to go away pretty soon, and before I go I want you to know——"

"Say, Allen, are you going home like a respectable citizen, or shall we have to use force?" It was Roy who accosted him, and Allen muttered something under his breath.

"I'm going home when I get good and ready," he was beginning, when Betty herself jumped to her feet and held out a hand to him.

"It *is* getting late," she said, "and we're all going to meet to-morrow, anyway, so we won't even say good-bye. *Au revoir,* everybody. It's been such a night!"

As she stood on the porch waving her hand to them, Allen hesitated a moment, started forward, then ran back again.

"There will come a night," he whispered, close in her ear, "when you won't get rid of me so easily."

And Betty, left alone, smiled a new smile at the stars.

CHAPTER XI

A SLACKER?

Two weeks went by after the great night, two weeks of ceaseless activity. The fame of Betty's lawn party had spread all over Deepdale, and countless smaller affairs on the same order had been given. As imitation is always the sincerest flattery, the girls were delighted.

"For we have the fun of knowing we started it," Mollie had said.

"Yes," said Betty. "We've made people understand that the Red Cross needs money, but, girls, there's another branch of the war work that isn't receiving much attention."

"What's that?" queried Grace, interested. It was just like Betty to have things entirely thought out before she said anything about them. "I never saw anybody with so many plans as you, Betty. You make my head swim."

"Well, there's the Y. W. C. A.," Betty explained. "It's doing wonderful work, but it will need a great deal more money than it has now, to keep it up in these war times."

"Goodness," said Amy. "I wish we'd thought about it sooner. The boys are sure they're going to be called every day, and if we took time to get up anything like the entertainment we had before, we couldn't have them in it."

"Oh, we couldn't give an affair like that without the boys," said Mollie decidedly, a fact which she would never have admitted in the hearing of the young men themselves. "And I'd hate to give anything tame, after the big success we had with the other one."

"That's just it," Betty pursued, holding a sock up to the light and regarding it critically. "I met Mrs. Barton Ross to-day——"

"Oh, isn't she lovely?" Amy interrupted enthusiastically. "By the time you've talked with her five minutes you're willing to promise her anything in the world."

"Goodness, I wish I had a gift like that," said Grace. "I could talk all day and nobody'd do *anything* for me."

"That's gratitude, isn't it?" said Mollie, in an aggrieved tone. "Here I walk two whole blocks out of my way, to buy you a box of candy when you didn't even ask me to——"

"Did you say you bought that box of candy for me?" asked Grace bitterly, eying the alluring box, where it lay in Mollie's lap. "Every time I

want one I have to look extra sweet and go down on my knees."

"More ingratitude," sighed Mollie. "Didn't I hear the doctor say you must stop eating so much ice cream and candy, if you wanted to keep your marvelous complexion?"

"No, you didn't," retorted Grace, "for the simple reason, that I haven't been to the doctor's for over two years."

"That's right, I guess it *was* your mother," Mollie admitted, wickedly helping herself to a delicious morsel.

"Goodness, my family's been prophesying that thing ever since I can remember," Grace retorted, putting aside her knitting, and drawing nearer to the candy box. "If I had listened to them I'd have worried myself into all sorts of things by this time."

"Instead you'd rather *eat* yourself into them," sighed Mollie primly, handing over the box with an air of resignation. "Betty, what was it you were saying?"

Betty chuckled.

"First of all, Grace is walking off with your wool," she said. "Look out, Grace, you'll break it."

"It was about Mrs. Barton Ross, wasn't it?" asked Amy patiently.

"Oh, yes! Well, she suggested that we give the same performance over again. Everybody liked it, and any number of people had spoken to her about it, saying they'd like to see it over again. Of course we'd have to leave out the booths and things; they would take too much time to get ready, but we might give the sketch."

"Goodness, that's a regular compliment," gurgled Mollie, knitting furiously. "Instead of —as Roy would say—'getting the hook,' they ask us to do it all over again. I wouldn't have thought any audience would stand for it."

"Well," continued Betty, "I told Mrs. Ross I'd talk it over with you folks, and if we did it at all, it would be for the benefit of the Y. W. C. A. Of course, we don't know how the boys will feel about it."

But the boys were perfectly willing to give the play again, declaring that "if Deepdale could stand for it, they surely could."

Deepdale did stand for it to the amount of a sum that made Mrs. Barton Ross open her eyes wide in delighted astonishment. The affair was a huge success.

"I don't know how to thank you," she had said to Betty and Grace, who had been appointed by the others to take the money to her. "You girls have waked Deepdale up with a vengeance.

We were always intensely patriotic, but we hardly knew how to go about showing it, until you came and pointed the way."

Mrs. Barton Ross was the manager of the local Y. W. C. A., and every one in Deepdale both loved and respected her personally and as an influence for good.

"I believe," said Betty, as the two girls left her and started for home, "I'd like to join the Y. W. C. A. also if only to be near Mrs. Barton Ross. When I've talked with her for a little while, I always feel as if I'd been to church, or something like that."

And that was the way it came about. Not being satisfied with Red Cross work alone, the Outdoor Girls joined the Y. W. C. A., and from that time on their days were filled to overflowing.

"It's all very well to knit in the day time," Roy complained one stormy evening, when the four couples of young folks had congregated in Mollie's cheerful living-room; "but I don't see why you have to keep it up all evening too. It gets me dizzy just to watch the needles."

"Well, why don't you get busy and learn to knit yourselves?" asked Mollie with a twinkle. "Percy Falconer was telling me that in one place several men had gotten together, and formed a knitting club. Of course, they're too old to join

the army or the navy, so they thought they'd do their bit that way."

"Yes, and they've even made up a knitting song," chuckled Betty. "And while they knit, they sing."

"The little dears," said Frank disgustedly. "Well, thank heaven, I'm not too old to fight."

"I imagine that's just the sort of club dear Percy would like to join," remarked Allen, smiling. "It's easier to imagine him in a corner by the fireside knitting socks for soldiers, than in any other rôle."

Percy Falconer was the dude of Deepdale, whom the other vigorous and hearty young folks pitied more than they despised.

"I wonder if he'll enlist," said Roy interestedly. "It's kind of hard to picture old Percy washing his own dishes."

"Enlist!" snorted Frank. "Of course he won't. He'll wait till he's drafted, and then pray every night that he'll be sick or something, so he won't have to go. I know his kind."

"Oh, there'll probably be a lot that will try to dodge the draft by dropping hammers on their toes, and cutting off their fingers and all such clever and noble little things as that," said Allen.

"Oh, Allen, do you think so?" asked Amy,

gazing at him with horrified eyes over her knitting.

"Why, of course," Roy backed him up. "It won't happen so much among our boys. The slum districts will get most of it. Some of those suckers would do almost anything to get out of fighting."

"Goodness," said Betty, with a little shiver. "I should think it would take lots more courage to hurt yourself than to take a chance on getting shot in the trenches. I don't see how anybody can do it."

"Oh, they're doing worse things than that," said Allen with a chuckle. "Hundreds of the scared ones are getting married in the hope that they can get out of it that way."

"Jumping from the frying pan into the fire," grinned Roy.

"Or from one war to another," added Frank, while the girls made faces at them.

"But isn't Congress going to pass some sort of law," asked Betty earnestly—Allen reflected how very pretty she was when in earnest—"that will make that kind of man serve first? It seems to me I read something about it in the paper."

"Goodness, I don't even get time to read the paper any more," sighed Amy. "I feel wicked if I stop knitting for five minutes."

"We'll allow you that much," said Allen graciously. "Why, yes, there is a law like that pending, Betty, and I imagine there will be quite a few happy homes broken up."

"Did you hear about Herb Wilson?" asked Roy suddenly.

Herbert Wilson was another of the Deepdale boys.

"No," was the answer. "What's he been doing now?"

"Why, he was spending the week-end at a house party when his folks telegraphed him that his orders had come, and he was to report for duty the next morning. Well, the poor old chap didn't even have time to get home and say good-bye—had to rush off the next morning and was sent down South. His mother came over to see mine, and, the way she went on about it, you'd have thought Herb was going to be shot at sunrise!"

"Herb ought to answer like the old negro my uncle had on his plantation," remarked Allen with a smile. " 'Marse,' he said, 'dar ain't no chaince o' my bein' shot at sunrise—no, sah. I don' never git up dat early.' "

They laughed, and Grace remarked casually:

"I admire that negro. He has my own idea exactly."

"You know, as far as I'm concerned I rather envy Herb," said Frank, while the girls stared at him in surprise. "Not for being called away without having time to say good-bye to his folks, of course, but for receiving his orders. Waiting and expecting them every day is mighty hard on your nerves, I can tell you."

"Gee, it's time we were moving, Grace," said Will, jumping up. He had been silent for the greater part of the evening. "It's getting late and you've done enough knitting for one day."

This was the signal for a general breaking up, and as the young folks rose to say good-bye they stole furtive glances at Will.

What was the matter with him? they wondered. Will, who had always been the life of a party before, and so intensely patriotic and thoroughly American! Yet he was the only one among them who was not shouldering his share of the nation's responsibility.

As Allen lingered after he and Betty had reached her home she spoke her wonderment and worry.

"Allen," she said, a little troubled line between her brows, "do you know what's the matter with Will? Is he, can he be—a slacker?"

"I don't know," said Allen, shoving his hands deep into his pockets as he always did when any-

thing was, as he expressed it, "too deep for him." "I can't make him out at all, Betty. We'll just have to hope for the best."

"That's all we can do," she answered, and gave a long-drawn sigh.

CHAPTER XII

HONOR FLAGS

"YES, yes, this is Betty.—Oh, Allen!—When?—To-morrow morning! Oh, isn't that terribly short notice?—Oh, I can't, I can't believe it!—Roy and Frank, too?—No, I didn't hear about it.—Listen, Allen.—No, I'm *not* crying.—What's that?—Well, I'm trying not to!—Please listen to me.—Bring the boys around here to-night, will you? I'll get the girls and we'll have a p-party.—No, I'm *not* crying.—G-good-bye!"

With a little jerk Betty hung up the receiver, and sat staring out of the window with the tears streaming down her cheeks. She brushed them away impatiently and felt feverishly for her pocket handkerchief.

"Oh, I h-hate the old Kaiser, and I hate the old war, and I h-hate everything!" she wailed, rolling the handkerchief up into a miserable little ball. "Wh-what will we do when the b-boys are gone and we haven't anything to do, but just think of the time they'll be sent over to France to get k-killed? Oh, Betty, don't act so f-foolish," she

scolded, putting away the handkerchief with an air of decision. "You know you wouldn't have had them do anything else anyway——

"Oh, there's that old telephone again.

"Yes, hello, Mollie.—Isn't it terrible?—Oh, do come around—and stay for supper.—I—I can't bear to be left alone.—Good-bye."

"Well, what are we going to do?"

The four girls had gathered once more on Betty's porch and were regarding each other mournfully.

"Do?" echoed Grace. "Why, we can't do anything, of course, but let them go."

"But it won't seem at all like Deepdale!" mourned Amy.

"Well, the only thing I can see that we can do," sighed Mollie, "is to become Red Cross nurses and go across with them."

"That probably wouldn't do any good, either," objected Betty, "as far as being with the boys is concerned, because we'd probably be sent to another part of the field entirely, and probably wouldn't see them from the beginning of the war to the end of it. No, I guess we'll just have to keep on knitting for them."

"They're going to write to us, anyway," said Mollie. "And we must write to them a good

deal, too. They say the boys are just crazy for letters when they're away from home."

"Yes, and sometimes girls and women correspond with boys they never saw and never expect to see," added Amy, "just because they haven't any relatives, and it makes it less lonesome for them."

"I imagine we'll have all we want to do just to keep up our correspondence with the boys we know," said Betty, knitting steadily. "I think it's wonderful the way practically all of Deepdale has volunteered. It makes you proud to live here."

"Yes, and they all seem to be leaving about the same time, too," said Mollie. "Service flags are springing up all over town."

"It's terrible," said Amy, with another sigh. "I can't walk along the street and see those flags in the houses of people we've grown up with, without having a funny lump rise in my throat, and I have to hurry past to keep myself from acting foolishly."

"I guess none of us really knew we were at war until all the boys we know began to be called away," said Grace seriously. "And I know you girls must all think it's strange——" she paused for a moment as if uncertain just how to proceed, and the girls looked at her in surprise.

"I—I'm so worried about Will," Grace continued, not raising her eyes from her knitting. "He hasn't been himself for a month—you girls must have noticed that—and he won't give me any satisfaction at all when I ask him what's the matter. We—he and I—used to be such good friends——" her voice broke and the girls' hearts ached for her, "and now he acts just like a stranger—only asks to be left alone. And he's so moody and queer and silent——" Her voice trailed off and for a long time no one spoke.

The girls were troubled, and they longed to give her sympathy. It was hard to know just what to say, for Will had puzzled them all sorely.

"I wouldn't worry too much, Gracie, dear," said Betty, at last, going over and sitting down beside her friend. "Will has some problem that he's trying to work out all by himself. We know that he's true blue all the way through, and when he's ready to confide in us, he'll do it. Until then, we've just got to trust him, that's all, and help him all we can by our good faith."

Grace's head had dropped on Betty's shoulder and she was crying softly.

"B-Betty, you're such a comfort," she murmured as Betty gently stroked her hair. "That was j-just what I w-wanted you to say. I've been so m-miserable."

That was more than the girls could stand, for they remembered how gallantly Grace had striven to hide her trouble during all these weeks, and they gathered around her, whispering little words of endearment and comfort, till she started to laugh and cry together, calling herself an "old goose" and clinging to them desperately.

It was some time before they grew calm and could speak coherently. Then Amy sighed and said:

"Oh, dear, it's a quarter past six and I promised to be home by six sharp. Now what shall I do?"

"Telephone your brother that you're staying here," said the Little Captain decidedly. "The boys are coming to-night, you know, and you can all help me with the spread. No, you needn't waste time arguing—you're going to stay."

And when Betty spoke in that tone, no one dared dispute with her.

It was half past eight before the boys came, and the girls were getting so nervous and impatient they could hardly sit still.

"Do you suppose they could have forgotten?" Amy was beginning, when the sound of masculine voices in excited conversation floated to them on the breeze, and she stopped short to listen.

"They're coming," cried Mollie. "There's no

mistaking Frank's raucous tones, or Roy's either, for that matter. What do you suppose they're so excited about?"

A few moments later the boys themselves ran up the steps, greeted the girls cheerily, and ranged themselves in various attitudes upon the railing of the porch.

"Say, did you hear the latest news?" asked Roy eagerly, before the greetings were half over. "Another American ship has been sunk by those beastly Huns, and quite a number of passengers are reported missing. Gee, I wish instead of going to a training camp we were going right across. It seems a crime to be wasting time on this side when we might be getting at them."

"Another ship!" cried Betty, while the boys eagerly poured forth the details. "Oh, if I were only a man," she added, clenching her hands as the recital finished, "I'd fight until there wasn't one German left on the face of the earth."

"You just leave that to us," said Frank, his eyes gleaming. "We may not be able to exterminate the whole German nation, but we'll drag the old Kaiser to his knees and make him kiss the Stars and Stripes before we get through. Gee, but I'm aching to get right into the thick of it all!"

"What's this?" asked Betty, as Allen handed

her several sheets of paper, rolled together and fastened with a rubber band.

"Music," explained Allen, who had not taken his eyes from her face since he had come upon the porch. "A reporter I know handed them to me. They're all the popular war songs, and I thought perhaps we might run them over to-night."

They went into the living-room, where Betty's treasured grand piano was. Betty played and the others sang until they came to "Keep the Home Fires Burning," when Allen interfered.

"If nobody minds," he said seriously, "I'd like to hear Betty sing that—alone."

And Betty, who knew the song and had always liked it, started to sing. But she did not get far. Something swelled and swelled in her throat and every time she came to the lines:

"Though our lads are far away
They think of home——"

tears blinded her eyes, her voice quivered, and she had to stop.

Three times she tried it, then with a little sob, dropped her head on her arm and sat still. The girls ran to her, while the boys turned away to hide their own emotion.

"Never mind, Betty dear," whispered Mollie, wiping a tear from the end of her nose and patting Betty's hand tenderly. "We—we all feel the same way about it."

Betty raised her head and smiled a little April smile upon them.

"I'll always keep the home fires b-burning," she said unsteadily, "but I c-can't sing about it."

CHAPTER XIII

"SMILE, GIRLS, SMILE"

"WAKE up, Gracie." Betty's voice was low and excited as she shook her friend into semi-wakefulness. "The boys have to catch the early train, you know, and we mustn't keep them waiting."

"Yes, I know," said Grace, waking to full consciousness without a protest—for the first time since Betty had known her. "What time is it, Betty?"

"Six-thirty," answered Betty, beginning to dress hurriedly. "That's fifteen minutes later than we should be. Oh, if we should miss seeing them off!"

"Betty, I don't feel like myself at all," said Grace, after a silence during which they had both been plunged in thought. She flourished a shoe in the air and regarded Betty as though it were her fault. "I feel all quivery and shaky and trembly inside, and I don't think I could smile if you paid me for it."

"Goodness, I know I couldn't!" said Betty, and

then added as she pinned on the bunch of carnations Allen had brought her the night before: "We've just got to smile, though, whether we feel like it or not. We don't want the boys to remember us in tears."

"I should say not!" responded Grace emphatically. "When I cry I'm a perfect fright. That's why I never do it."

Betty chuckled despite the dull ache at her heart.

"I wasn't quite thinking of that," she said. "But it surely will be better if we're able to smile a little bit. Come on—let's practice."

They stood together before the mirror, doing their best to smile naturally, and their very failure to do it made them laugh at themselves.

"If we're not a couple of geese," said Betty, as arms intertwined, they descended the stairs. "That's about the first time we ever had to *try* to smile. Now for a bite of breakfast."

But, try though they did, they could not eat, and finally had to give it up entirely.

"We were all to meet at Mollie's, weren't we?" asked Grace, as they made their way down the sun-flooded street. "Oh, Betty, I'm afraid to meet anybody, I'm so sure I'm going to make a goose of myself. Will you hold my hand all the time?"

"Of course," said Betty, laughing unsteadily. "It's always hard to say good-bye to anybody you —you—like," she added, "but when they're going away to war and you may never see them again——"

"Please don't," begged Grace, squeezing her hand convulsively. "If you talk like that I just can't stand it, that's all. It wouldn't take very much——"

"All right, I won't do it again," cried Betty with forced gaiety. "Isn't that Mollie waving to us? Of course it is. Come on, Grace, I'll run you a race."

But Grace was in no mind to run a race, and Betty reached the meeting place alone, with Grace trailing in the rear.

"Have any of the boys reached here yet?" asked Betty as she ran up the steps. "I was afraid we'd be late."

"No, they haven't come," said Mollie, looking anxiously down the street; "and I'm so afraid they'll be late and miss the train, I don't know what to do. Do you suppose they could have forgotten?"

"Mollie Billette," cried Betty, looking at her wonderingly, "what on earth——"

"Oh, I know I'm impossibly silly," cried Mollie, dropping into a chair and rocking nervously; "but

I just don't know what I'm saying this morning. I feel as if somebody was dead."

"Not yet—but soon," boomed a deep voice behind them that made them jump a foot.

"Roy Anderson!" cried Mollie, her French temper flaring forth. "That's a nice thing to do —come up behind us and scare us all to death. And it's not nice to joke about such a serious thing, either."

"Gee, it won't do any good to cry about it," retorted Roy philosophically, looking around upon the three pretty girls with an appreciative eye. "I call it a great lark, and if only you girls were coming along my happiness would be complete."

"Where are the other boys?" broke in Betty. "I thought you were all coming together."

"I called for both of them," Roy answered, grinning, "but it seems they'd overslept themselves, and they said they'd be along later."

"Well, if it's very *much* later," said Grace grimly, "they might as well go back to bed again. That train isn't going to wait."

"Oh, they'll be here all right," Roy assured her confidently. "They're not going to be left behind when there's any adventure like this afoot."

"Here they come now," cried Betty, running to the edge of the porch and waving frantically.

"Amy's with them, too. Must have picked her up on the way."

"We'll save time if we go on down to meet them," Roy suggested, taking Grace by the arm. "Come along, girls, we really haven't any time to waste."

Betty and Mollie needed no such invitation. They were down the steps and flying along the street before Grace had risen from her chair.

"Oh, we were so afraid you'd be late," gasped Betty, as Allen caught her on the wing, as it were, and drew her to his side. "And if you weren't there on time, you might be tried for desertion, mightn't you?" she added, looking so adorable in her concern that Allen failed to reassure her right away.

"Well, I don't know that we have to be there just on the minute," he answered, smiling down at her. "But I may be really tried for desertion some day. I can't stay away from you very long, Betty."

She flushed and turned her eyes away.

"I wouldn't get you into any trouble for the world," she said demurely.

"Will you write every day?" pleaded Allen, leaning close, and for the moment these two were absolutely alone. "Letters are the next best thing to having you with me, Betty. And if you stop

writing, I give you fair warning I'll come straight home on the next train, furlough or no furlough, to see what the matter is; and if I get shot at sunrise, so much the better. Betty, will you promise me?" He said it pleadingly.

"I—I'll try to write every day," she answered, still not daring to look at him; "but you mustn't mind if some days it's only a little line. I'm going to be terribly busy."

"I expect to be busy, too," said Allen, drawing himself up a little; "but I'd manage to find time to write to you every day if I had to let other things go."

"Allen," she laid a hand on his arm and he covered it eagerly with his own, "I *will* write to you every day and it will be a good long one, too."

"Not from a sense of duty?" he asked, still a little unbelieving, though his heart was throbbing painfully. "You won't write just because you'll think I'll be expecting it, Betty?"

"No," she said, her voice very low, so low that he had to bend close to catch the words. "I'll write to you, Allen—because I—can't help myself."

"Betty," he cried, "look at me."

"Th-there's the engine whistle," she said unsteadily.

"Engine whistle be hanged!" cried Allen ex-

plosively. "Betty, I want you to look at me."

Then, as she still turned from him, he deliberately put a hand beneath her chin and turned her face to meet his.

"Betty, little Betty," he cried tenderly, seeing that her eyes were wet with tears, "do you care as much as that? Little girl——"

"D-don't be nice to me," she sobbed, feeling for her handkerchief. "I don't want to c-cry. I want to send you away with a s-smile——"

"Betty," he cried, crushing her to him for a minute, as the train thundered into the station, "I love you, I love you—do you hear that? Goodbye, little girl—little girl——"

The boys tore themselves away, not daring to look back until they reached the train. And the girls stood in a pathetically brave little group, waving to them and smiling through their tears.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SPY AGAIN

They watched until the train was only a dot in the far distance, then turned disconsolately away.

"Well, they're gone," said Amy, when they had walked three whole blocks in silence.

"Goodness, why don't you tell us something we don't know?" snapped Mollie. "Please forgive me, Amy," she added the next moment, as Amy's eyes filled with tears. "I know I'm a beast, but I can't seem to help it this morning."

"Only this morning?" asked Grace maliciously, and Mollie made a face at her—which went far toward making them feel more normal.

"Didn't the boys say Camp Liberty was only a couple of hundred miles from here?" asked Betty thoughtfully. Camp Liberty was the cantonment in which the boys were to receive their initial military training.

"Yes," said Mollie, glancing at her friend sharply. "Now what plan have you got up your

sleeve, Betty Nelson? I never in my life saw a girl so full of plans."

"Goodness, this isn't a plan," said Betty, though her eyes brightened eagerly. "It's just a wild idea, that's all. You've all heard of the Hostess Houses they're establishing at the different camps?"

"Yes," they answered, impatient for what was to come.

"Well, Mrs. Barton Ross said that there was a Y. M. C. A. hut at Camp Liberty," Betty's face flushed with the daring of this new plan, "but that there was no Hostess House there, yet."

"Well?" they queried, not quite catching her meaning.

"Of course it's probably absurd," said the Little Captain half apologetically, "but I thought—I thought——"

"Oh, Betty, for goodness sake, what did you think?" cried Mollie, unable longer to bear the suspense.

"That—that we might work in it," finished Betty, rather expecting to be laughed at.

"Betty!" gasped Grace, standing stock-still in the middle of the sidewalk and gazing at Betty open-mouthed. "Do you suppose there's a chance that we could?"

"Betty Nelson, you're a wonder!" cried Mollie,

throwing her arm about the Little Captain in a bear's hug. "I'd never have thought of that in a thousand years."

"Well, I don't know but what it was mighty foolish to think of it," said Betty ruefully. "It would be mighty hard to get our hopes all raised for nothing."

"Let's go around and see Mrs. Ross this morning," Amy suggested, adding with sublime confidence: "She'll fix it so we can go."

"I only wish I felt as sure," said Betty, still thinking how foolish she had been not to speak to Mrs. Ross about it herself before she had proposed it to the girls. Now she had got them all excited—and it was such a wild idea.

"Oh, Betty, don't be a wet blanket," said Mollie impatiently. "I'd rather have my hopes raised just to be disappointed than never to have any hopes at all."

"It would be lots of fun," Grace went on, her eyes shining at the mere thought. "We've heard so much about these Hostess Houses that I've just been crazy to see one. But to live right there at the camp——"

"We could help to see that the friends and mothers and sweethearts of the boys were made comfortable," cried Mollie enthusiastically. "And if there were too many to be entertained at the

Hostess House we could get families outside to entertain them. Oh, it would be no end of fun."

"Oh, I wish I hadn't said anything," wailed the poor Little Captain. "Now if we are disappointed, as we almost certainly shall be, it will be all my fault."

"I don't know why it would be your fault," said Grace, slipping a loyal arm about her friend. "You've chased the gloom away for one morning at least, and if nothing comes of this idea, we'll at least have had the delights of anticipation."

"There's Mrs. Ross now," cried Mollie suddenly, as a figure emerged from one of the cross streets and started on ahead of them. "Let's run after her and learn our fate right away."

And they did run, with the result that a moment later Mrs. Barton Ross was surrounded by four very much excited, gesticulating and pretty girls, all talking at once and all clamoring for her attention.

She watched them a moment, admiring their flushed cheeks and bright eyes, then laughingly held up her hand.

"One at a time," she begged. "I can play a different air with each hand on the piano, but I'm not gifted enough to understand four people all talking at once. Now, if you'll just say it all over again."

"Betty, you tell her," begged Amy, and so, eagerly, Betty put her request.

"I know it's probably very foolish," she finished, anxiously watching Mrs. Ross' kindly, interested face. "But we thought, just perhaps, it might be possible."

"There's no 'just perhaps' about it," said Mrs. Ross decidedly, and the girls wondered if they could believe the evidence of their ears. "In fact," she continued, "I was going to speak to you girls about that very thing this morning. You have been so successful in rousing the general spirit here, that I thought you would be just the ones to make a Hostess House at Camp Liberty a success. Why, yes, I think it can very easily be arranged."

Then the girls forgot dignity and decorum and everything else and just celebrated. In the exuberance of their joy they hugged Mrs. Ross until she gasped for breath, then they danced off down the street on feet that scarcely touched the ground.

"Oh, it's too good to be true," cried Mollie, when at last their excitement had quieted down a little; then, gleefully, "Won't the boys be surprised?"

"Let's not tell them," Grace suggested. "It would be fun not to let them know a thing about

it till we actually got there. I want to see their faces."

"Who's that?" cried Mollie, grasping Betty's arm as a man sauntered out from a cross street, glanced at them, then quickly dodged back behind a house. "It looked like——"

"It was!" finished Betty, running swiftly in the direction the man had taken.

"The spy!" gasped Amy, who with Grace, as usual, brought up the rear. "Oh, Betty, be careful! You don't want to get shot!"

Mollie and Betty, panting, just reached the end of the street in time to see the man disappearing down another and knew that pursuit was useless.

"Oh, dear!" cried Mollie, ready to cry with vexation. "If we were only half a dozen men apiece, and could have gotten our hands on him!"

"Yes, I wouldn't very much mind getting my pearl lavallière back," said Grace, as she and Amy joined them.

"And my gold watch," mourned Mollie.

"Look, girls, he dropped something," cried Betty, who had gone on a few steps in advance of them. "And it's—why, I do believe it's——"

"My opal ring!" cried Mollie, staring at it unbelievingly. "Oh, I can't believe it. Give it to me, Betty; it has my initials on the inside. Yes, that's my ring."

The ring passed from one to the other, and the girls regarded it thoughtfully.

"Which proves beyond the shadow of a doubt," said Betty at last, "that Adolph Hensler was the thief."

"Oh, if we could only have stopped him!" mourned Amy, for perhaps the eleventh time. "It's terrible to be so close and then lose sight of him again."

"If it weren't for getting back our stolen things," said Grace with a little shiver, "I'd be only too glad not to lay eyes on his beauteous countenance again. Goodness, I know I'll dream of him to-night."

They walked on after that for some time in silence, each one busy with her own absorbing thoughts. Then suddenly Betty spoke.

"Do you know, girls," she said, "I may be foolish—probably I am, but I have a strong conviction that some time we're going to meet that spy again—and the third time he isn't going to get away from us!"

CHAPTER XV

MORE SURPRISES

THE next few weeks were filled with such excitement that the girls even forgot to miss the boys. In the letters they received from the latter —and they were many—they never failed to find comments upon this strange fact. The boys seemed to feel a little aggrieved that the girls did not weep a few more tears in the absence of their devoted swains.

"Of course I want you to be happy, Betty," Allen had written once upon this theme, "but I'd like to feel that you missed me, a little anyway. It makes a fellow feel as though it wouldn't make any difference if he disappeared off the face of the earth. If you missed me one-tenth as much as I miss you——" etc., etc., until Betty's laugh bubbled over and she patted the letter consolingly.

"Never mind, Allen, dear," she said, putting the letter away carefully in the rapidly increasing pile, tied with the blue ribbon. "If you only knew what I know, you wouldn't have time to

miss me so much either. But I am glad," she added, all to herself, flushed of face and shy-eyed, "oh, so very glad, Allen, to have you miss me!"

So the days went on, drawing rapidly nearer to the date of their departure, while the excitement and good spirits of the girls rose proportionately.

About a week before the great day, they gave another of the affairs which had grown so rapidly in popularity. This time it was to raise funds for the Hostess House, and the girls gave heart and soul and all their time to make it a success.

They were to have some very elaborate tableaux with dancing afterward, and all Deepdale was on tiptoe with anticipation long before the night arrived. And how they all enjoyed it!

It spoke well for the patriotism of the young men of Deepdale that there were very few within the age of enlistment, who had not already gone to the various training camps, scattered all over the country. So there were very few at the dance, giving, as Betty's father jokingly said, a chance for the "young old men" to show their accomplishments.

And the "young old men," did so well that there had never, in all the history of Deepdale,

been a merrier party. Being an age when everybody danced, up to the grandfathers of ninety, the girls had no lack of partners, and were oftentimes amazed at the skill and dexterity and lightness shown by men who were old enough to be their fathers twice over.

Of course some of them were stiff and a little "creaky in the joints," but this only added to the general hilarity, and at one o'clock the fun was still fast and furious.

"Oh, I never had such a good time," cried Mollie, sinking down beside Betty on one of the roughly improvised benches, weak from laughing. "I was just dancing with old Doctor Riley, and he kept me in stitches. Half the time he had almost to carry me around, I was laughing so."

Betty nodded and dimpled bewitchingly as Mr. Bailey, father of ten children, gallantly asked for the next dance.

"You're taking a chance, Miss Betty," he said, the corners of his eyes crinkling into a million wrinkles as he laughed down at her. "I used to be considered a fairly good dancer in the old days, but I haven't danced in the last ten years. I watched the young folks so much, though, I thought I'd take a chance if you were willing. If I step on your toes too much we can go over and get some ice cream and cake."

"You're doing wonderfully," said Betty heartily, amazed to find how much she was really enjoying the dance. "I'm going to write to the boys, and say we don't need them any more," she added whimsically. "I'll tell them we're just beginning to appreciate their fathers!"

When it was over, their proceeds amounted to over a hundred dollars; and that was not counting an uproarious good time, that none of the young or middle-aged folk of Deepdale would ever stop talking about.

Then at last came the dawning of the great day —the day the girls had looked forward to for weeks. They woke with a strange, thrilly sensation running up and down their spines, and hearts that refused to beat normally.

In four separate houses, four separate girls dressed with trembling fingers and eyes on the clock; and four separate girls kept saying over and over again: "What will they say? What will they say?"

They met at Mollie's as usual—a tense-faced, excited little group—with parents and relatives who were going to the train to see them off.

"Have we plenty of time?" asked Amy, who for two days and nights had lived in the fear of losing that train. "I guess maybe we'd better hurry."

"Oh, there is oceans of time," Mrs. Ross assured them, who seemed, for some unaccountable reason, bent on delaying them. "The train isn't due for ten minutes yet, and then it's more than likely to be late. Besides, there are a few last words I'd like to say to you girls that can be said better here than on the station platform."

Then she started to give them some minute instructions, to which they tried hard to listen respectfully, although the mere effort to sit still was torture, and Mollie afterward said she "wanted to scream."

However, the harangue lasted at the most, two minutes—although it seemed to the girls two ages—and they were at last on their way to the station. It was not till they turned the corner that brought the familiar platform in view, that they received their first surprise.

The station was fairly thronged with people!

"Wh-what is it?" stammered Betty, rubbing her eyes to make sure she was not dreaming.

"Is everybody in Deepdale going away?" added Mollie, her eyes big with wonder.

"I've never seen so many people at the station at one time," added Grace, bewildered.

"Do you know what it is, Mrs. Ross?" asked Amy.

But Mrs. Ross made no answer—she did not

have to. The crowd at the station caught sight of the four girls, and a great shout went up.

"Hurray," cried a masculine voice. "Hurray for the Outdoor Girls. Give 'em three cheers and a tiger."

The girls stood still, amazed, bewildered, until suddenly, out of a maze of tangled thoughts, light dawned.

"They're cheering *us*, Mollie," whispered Betty, squeezing Mollie's hand until it hurt—at least it would have if Mollie had noticed it. "All these people have turned out early just to see us off."

"I—I'm afraid I'm going to cry," said Mollie unsteadily.

When the shouts had died down, Doctor Riley made a speech full of true Irish wit and humor, and pathos, too, telling the girls how deeply Deepdale had appreciated the active and patriotic work they had done for their country in the time of its bitterest need and how very sorry they all were to see them go.

He went on to tell something of what the country was doing and had done, cracking a few jokes based on camp life, that almost sent the girls into hysterics—so finely balanced were they between laughter and tears. Then he ended with another eulogy of the Outdoor Girls and the hope that

health and good fortune would follow them wherever they went.

He stepped down from the box on which he had been making his address just as the sharp toot of the whistle gave warning of the train's approach. Some one handed him four little corsage bouquets of carnations, which he handed in turn to each one of the tremulous girls, with an appropriate little speech to each.

With a grinding of breaks the train came to a standstill, and the crowd gave way to let them pass. Clutching the little bouquets tight and hoping desperately that they would not cry, the girls started for the train.

At the bottom of the steps Betty turned and faced them.

"You dear people," she began, but choked and had to try again. "I—we—want to thank you——" Then, as two tears forced their way through and rolled unchecked down her face, she turned and ran up the car steps.

"All we can say," she added, smiling unsteadily down at them as the train began to move, "is just that we—we—love you all!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE HOSTESS HOUSE

ONCE settled comfortably in the seats, the girls smiled across at each other unsteadily.

"We didn't deserve it," said Amy, brushing away a tiresome tear that would insist upon trickling down her face.

"None of us did, except Betty," said Grace, recovering enough to open the chocolate box she had thoughtfully purchased at a drug store. "She was the one who really thought up all the things, and all we did was follow where she led."

"That's foolish, and you know it is," said Betty, beginning to get indignant. "I'd like to know how much of it I could have done without you girls! And of course the boys helped wonderfully, too."

"Goodness, what's the use of arguing?" Mollie broke in. "The fact remains that we've been cheered by a crowd of our friends, made speeches to, and presented with bouquets, and I don't care

who's fault it was it all happened. I'm too happy."

"Happy," echoed Amy, gazing dreamily out of the window at the flying landscape. "I never was so happy in my life before—except for one thing." Her face clouded a little and she bit her lip.

"What one thing?" asked Mollie with interest. Grace and Betty turned to gaze at her inquiringly.

"Oh, n-nothing," stammered Amy, very much confused to find all eyes upon her. "I was just—thinking aloud, I guess."

"Well, do it some more," suggested Grace, passing her the candy. "Something tells me it might be interesting."

"Goodness, it is interesting," laughed Betty, changing the subject to save Amy further embarrassment. "Have any of you girls ever heard Grace talk in her sleep?"

"Now, Betty," Grace turned upon her reproachfully. "You're never going to——"

"Yes, she is," cried Mollie gleefully. "What does she say, Betty? It ought to be good."

"I never say anything that isn't good," put in Grace primly, adding, as she saw the light of mischief in Betty's eye. "If you tell tales out of school, Betty Nelson, I'll never forgive you."

"It's awfully funny," began Betty, bubbling over, while Mollie leaned forward gleefully. "She talks in such a wee small voice, and sometimes she'll even answer questions—if you speak very coaxingly."

"I know, but what does she *say*?" asked Mollie impatiently. "Goodness, I've missed a lot."

"Well, I remember one conversation we had," began Betty reflectively.

"Betty," Grace broke in imploringly, "I had a mistaken notion that you were a friend of mine."

"I am, dear," answered Betty soothingly. "I won't give away any secrets—not many, anyway——"

"Betty," cried Grace desperately, "I'll stop you if I have to use force."

"We'll protect you, Betty," Mollie promised. "Go ahead, tell us about that conversation."

"It was very interesting," complied Betty, with exasperating deliberation, and eyes brimming over with fun. "It seems to me we were discussing some of the boys we knew——"

"Betty," cried poor Grace again, her face flaming, "if you say one word more, I'll never speak to you again."

"Well, in that case," said Betty, settling back and looking disappointed, "I suppose I'll have to let you out."

"That's a nice way to treat us, I should say," cried Mollie disgustedly. "Just get our curiosity aroused and then sit on it. No, you needn't try to make it up by offering me candy, Betty. I'm just peeved."

"Goodness, I seem to make enemies whatever I do," said Betty plaintively. "I tell you what I'll do," she added, seized by inspiration.

"Take care," warned Grace, her mouth full of chocolate.

"We'll wait till some night when Grace has eaten a specially large amount of chocolates and ice cream——"

"We won't have to wait long," murmured Mollie.

"And then I'll invite you all to a séance," finished Betty, sitting back and looking tremendously satisfied with herself. "Then you can question Grace for yourselves."

"But does she actually answer you?" asked Amy, still incredulous. "I've heard of people talking in their sleep, but I never heard of anybody's answering questions intelligently."

"Goodness, she doesn't!" said Betty wickedly. "How can you expect people to do in their sleep what they can't do when they're awake?"

"Betty Nelson!" cried Grace—and if looks could kill, Betty's moments would have been num-

bered—"that's the worst yet. Now I *am* offended."

"Oh, dear," said Betty, while the others giggled merrily. "I always seem to be getting myself in wrong. Will you pass me some candy, Grace?"

"No," said the latter firmly. "I only give candies to them what deserves 'em. Mollie, come back with those—come back with them—I tell you——"

But Mollie had whisked them off Grace's lap before she could interfere and had handed them around with great ceremony.

And so the journey continued amid a great deal of fun and merriment until the train was nearing Camp Liberty. Then the prospect of seeing the boys and surprising them made the girls so nervous they could hardly sit still.

"I did such a foolish thing," said Betty, as they put on their wraps in a flurry of haste. "I wrote to Allen yesterday and I'll see him before he gets the letter. It would have been better to have brought it along."

A few minutes later the train drew into the station, and a quartette of very pretty girls stepped to the platform. So pretty were they, in fact, that more than one passerby turned around to look a second time.

The girls gave their trunk checks to a negro

who came bustling up, stepped into a cab and, almost before they knew it, were being whirled along the streets at a reckless pace toward the Hostess House.

"Oh," gasped Amy, holding on tight to the seat. "I have worse stage fright now than I did on the night we gave the sketch. Everything's so new and strange."

"Well, what did you expect a strange city to be like?" asked Mollie practically.

In what seemed to them scarcely a second of time they had stopped before a very pretty, homelike house, and a polite chauffeur was holding the door of the cab open for them.

Still feeling as if it were all happening in a dream, they crossed the sidewalk and ran up the steps of the house. Before they had time to ring the bell a stout, middle-aged, motherly-looking woman opened the door and smiled down at them approvingly.

"Well, well," she said, holding the door wide for them, "walk right in, young ladies, and make yourselves at home."

"We expected you almost an hour sooner," she added, as the girls followed her into a big, cheerful front room. "I was rather afraid there might have been an accident on the road—there have been several lately."

"No, we were simply delayed," replied Betty with her prettiest smile—winning the woman's affections then and there. "Part of the way we could have walked faster than the train moved, I think."

"I'm Mrs. Watson," their hostess introduced herself a few minutes later, as she led the way upstairs. "Mrs. Barton Ross has no doubt told you I am representing the Y. W. C. A. here in Denton. I hope," she added, as the girls took off their coats and hats and "did things" to their hair, "that we are going to be friends."

"We shall be," chorused the girls, smiling at her happily, "if we have anything to say about it!"

CHAPTER XVII

HELPING UNCLE SAM

After dinner, the girls were taken over their new domain, and were enthusiastic about it. There were three big parlors where the boys could entertain their friends and relatives, also bedrooms enough to accommodate some score of people over night.

"Of course, as you see, we're not nearly in shape yet," Mrs. Watson apologized, as they came back to the big front room. "There are still pictures to be hung, some draperies and odds and ends to be bought that will change the looks of the place entirely. It is with those things you girls can help me immensely, if you will."

"That's what we came for," replied Betty quickly, while the other girls looked eager. "And besides, I think it will be a lark. Somehow, nothing seems half hard or strenuous enough to do for the boys that are giving up so much for us."

"That's the spirit we like to see," said Mrs.

Watson, looking at the girl's flushed face and shining eyes approvingly. "And it's the spirit," she added slowly, "that we see among nine-tenths of our girls and women these days. It's wonderful what we are accomplishing."

"It's nothing to what our boys are going to accomplish when they get into the fight," broke in Mollie, her eyes big and dark. "My one regret is that I can't put on a uniform, and fight side by side with them."

"But we can fight side by side with them," said Mrs. Watson, leaning forward very seriously. "Don't you suppose the thought of us and the certainty that we are backing them up with all our might, will be with the boys every minute while they're in the trenches, helping them to fight the Hun as they never would be able to alone?"

"Yes," said Mollie, impressed but still unconvinced. "But I should think it would help them ever so much more if we were really there in person. Women have proved themselves just as good fighters as men, you know."

"That might be all right," said Amy quietly. "But then who would stay at home to knit sweaters for them, and who would do the nursing work? We couldn't do that, and be in the trenches at the same time."

"That's the way I look at it," said Mrs. Watson, turning to the quiet girl and regarding her thoughtfully. "It seems to me we are doing far more good here at home where we've had experience, than we could possibly do in the actual fighting. But it's getting pretty late," she interrupted herself, "and you girls must be tired after your long journey. Suppose we get to bed right away, so that in the morning we can start bright and early to get things in shape."

They assented unanimously, for, although their desire for information was as unsatisfied as ever, their eyelids were heavy with sleep, and the thought of bed lured them irresistibly.

"Oh, I can't wait for the morning to come," sighed Betty, as she slipped in between the cool sheets. "It seems wicked to waste time in sleep."

"In the morning we'll work," said Mollie, her voice eager with anticipation; "and in the afternoon——"

"We'll go over and surprise the boys," finished Grace. "I can almost see their faces when we burst in upon them."

"There'll be no bursting," said Betty primly. "We've got to behave like perfectly proper young ladies."

"Oh, impossible," murmured Mollie; and five minutes later, they were all asleep.

Morning, and the sun shining brightly in the window, challenging them to action.

"Awake?" queried Mollie, leaning over and poking Betty experimentally.

"If I'm not I soon will be," said Betty, sitting up and regarding Mollie indignantly. "Goodness, that's a nice thing to do to a person. Couldn't you see I was asleep?"

"I was just asking you," said Mollie twinkling. "You looked so sweet and peaceful——"

"That you needs must spoil it all," said Betty plaintively. "My, but I'd hate to have that kind of a disposition."

"Won't you let me be your little alarm clock?" begged Mollie, leaning forward to administer another poke, which Betty skillfully dodged.

"No, I won't," she answered, adding, as she squinted out at the sun: "We don't need one in this room. We're facing directly east."

Mollie chuckled.

"Mrs. Watson made a mistake," she said, "when she put Grace and Amy in the other room. She should have put them in this one, so the sun could take our place and wake them up every morning. Betty, it's a glorious day."

"Don't you suppose I know it?" asked Betty, shaking herself impatiently, as the tang of the air and the brilliant sunshine got into her blood,

making her eager for action. "And it's only six o'clock," she added, appealing to her little wrist watch. "We'll never be able to get Grace and Amy up this early."

"Won't you, though?" chuckled a voice from the doorway, and they looked up quickly to find Grace standing there, with Amy laughing at them over her shoulder. And what was still more wonderful and startling—they were dressed!

Betty and Mollie stared unbelievingly for a moment, mouths and eyes wide open, then jumped out of bed and made a rush for the conspirators.

"I don't see how you did it," gasped Mollie a few minutes later, when they stopped for lack of breath. "There wasn't a sound——"

"Yes, there were, lots of them," said Grace, stopping before a mirror to tuck in a stray lock that had come loose in the general confusion. "Only you and Betty were talking so hard and fast, you didn't hear us. Goodness, but I'm hungry."

As this was the case with them all, and as the savory odor of bacon and eggs was wafted up to them at the moment from below stairs, they wasted scant time in making their way to it.

And after breakfast what a busy morning they spent! Never in all their active lives could they remember anything to equal it. Downtown first

of all to shop under Mrs. Watson's guidance, in stores that were so different from those in Deepdale, that they were in great danger of becoming hopelessly confused.

However, they eventually "got their bearings," as the boys would have said, and came home at last laden with parcels, and very much satisfied with themselves.

After luncheon, which was extremely well-cooked and tasted, oh, so good! Mrs. Watson proposed the one thing they wanted most to do.

"Suppose," she suggested, as they rose from the table, "that we call this a day and spend the afternoon in getting acquainted with the cantonment. It's extremely interesting, especially for those who have never been through one before. What do you say?"

What they said was enough to convince her she could not have struck upon a happier plan. Half an hour later, all talking at once and tremendously excited, they set out upon their tour of inspection.

Betty drew Grace a little apart from the others and they held a whispered consultation.

"What shall we do?" asked the former nervously. "Shall we send the orderly to hunt up the boys and bring them to us, or shall we just wait until we meet them by chance?"

"We might be here a week without doing that," said Grace, looking about at the scores of olive drab figures. "And in the meantime, they'd think it was very strange we didn't write to them."

"I suppose you're right," said Betty reluctantly, "but the other way would be so much more fun."

At this moment Mrs. Watson and the two other girls beckoned to them to hurry, and they had no chance for further conversation.

Then, just as Betty was about to broach the subject of the boys to Mrs. Watson, the unexpected happened.

A khaki-clad figure, cutting across their path at a dead run, almost collided with them, paused to gasp an apology, stopped still and stared. It was Allen!

"Betty!" he cried, with eyes for only one of them. "Wh-what are you doing here?"

"Just what you're doing," said Betty with spirit, though she was blushing furiously. "Helping Uncle Sam!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE EVENING GUN

"But wh-what?" stammered Allen, while Mrs. Watson looked on in amazement. "Wh-why didn't you let a fellow know?"

"We wanted to surprise you," said Betty gleefully, noting with pride how splendid he looked in his uniform. "You don't seem at all glad to see us. Mrs. Watson," remembering her manners in the nick of time, "this is a friend of ours from Deepdale—Allen Washburn. He didn't know we were coming."

"So I see," smiled Mrs. Watson, shaking hands warmly with Allen. "I'm very glad to know you, Mr. Washburn, and I hope we shall see you often at the Hostess House."

"It's very good of you," said Allen, still very much in the dark, and totally unable to keep his eyes from Betty's face. "Did you say the Hostess House?"

"Yes. That's what we came down for," said Mollie, who had been quiet just about as long as

she could. "To help run it, you know—and everything."

"Especially 'everything,'" drawled Grace.

"Say, that's great!" cried Allen, beginning to see light. "You mean you're going to stay here—maybe for weeks—and see that everybody has a good time—us included? Gee, what luck!"

"I'm glad you think so," said Betty demurely, while Allen wished desperately to have her alone. "What were you in such a hurry about, when you nearly ran into us?" she asked, with interest.

"I was going to look up Frank and Roy, to tell them we'd been granted our five-day furlough. We were going to make a bee line home to Deepdale. Now," he added, eyes still on Betty's averted face, "we won't have to!"

Mrs. Watson smiled sympathetically, and, being an ardent matchmaker, looked forward to having even more of an interesting season than she had expected.

"And it's the greatest luck ever," Allen continued enthusiastically, as they walked slowly across the parade ground, "that we happened to get our furlough just now. What are you girls doing this afternoon?"

"Seeing the sights," said Mollie. "We're taking a half-holiday."

'Gee!" cried Allen, fairly capering in his de-

light. "This is altogether too good to be true. Wait till I tell the fellows."

"Oh, but we want to surprise them," said Grace, stopping short and looking abused. "When we've come all this distance to do it, it isn't fair for you to have all the fun."

"All right, you stay here then," said Allen, conducting them around the corner of one of the low wooden buildings, which the girls afterward learned was the mess hall. "I'll look up the fellows, and lead the poor unsuspecting——"

"Goodness, you'd think we were going to murder them," broke in Mollie impatiently. "I wish you'd do something and not talk so much."

"Anything to oblige—see you later." Allen saluted smartly and went off briskly in search of the other boys.

Betty's eyes almost unconsciously followed the fine, stalwart figure till it disappeared around the corner of one of the buildings, and Mollie, who had been watching her closely, suddenly put an arm about her in a little impulsive hug.

"He *is* splendid, dear," she whispered, and once more Betty flushed to the roots of her pretty hair.

They had only a few minutes to wait before Allen came striding back to them, with two other khaki-clad figures. The girls shrank farther back

into the shadows of the building. Not until they were almost upon them did the boys catch sight of them. Then Roy and Frank just stood still and gaped, as Allen had done.

"Great jumping jerushaphat!" cried Roy, at last finding his tongue. "If it isn't the very people we wanted most to see in this world. Welcome, little strangers! Oh, gee, but you're welcome!"

Then Frank added some equally incoherent phrases, and for a few moments confusion reigned, while they shook hands over and over again, all talked at once to nobody in particular, and generally enjoyed themselves.

"And the best part of it is," said Roy enthusiastically, "that we can be free to show you girls about the place. And I tell you, it's something to see!"

Before the girls had been half shown about the place, they more than agreed with him. It was wonderfully inspiring, to see those hundreds of boys, with their splendidly trained young bodies and their determined young faces, knowing they were devoting their lives freely and cheerfully to the greatest cause in all history.

The girls peeped into the long, low buildings that were the sleeping quarters of the men, with their cots all in a row and clothes hung neatly

along the wall. They saw the guardhouse, where unruly soldiers were confined and forced to a state of reasonableness.

They regarded it with awe, and Amy even backed away from it a little.

"I don't like barred windows," she said. "It always makes me shiver."

"Humph," said Mollie, the irrepressible. "You'd better get used to them, Amy, dear. Some day we'll be feeding the boys peanuts through the bars."

"Gee, isn't she complimentary?" said Roy, as they walked on. "You don't know what models of deportment we've been since we came here."

"Yes," put in Grace sweetly, "they say military training does work miracles!"

"It's too bad you missed guard mount this morning," said Allen, while the rest laughed at Roy's discomfiture.

"That's when they change the guard, isn't it?" asked Betty.

"Yes, and they're very formal about it," Allen continued. "It's really very impressive, and the band is a joy forever. You must get up bright and early in the morning."

"As if we didn't always," said Betty indignantly.

"Oh, listen to the music," cried Amy, her head

on one side like a bird. "Isn't it great? I simply can't keep my feet still."

"It's over at the other end of the parade," said Frank, taking Grace's arm and leading her in the direction of the stirring strains. "Every nice afternoon they have a concert from three to four. It's mighty fine, too."

"Oh, I'm so glad I came," cried Betty, to whom music was like the wine of life.

"So am I," said Allen, drawing her away from the party and speaking softly. "I've seen your face so often in my dreams, Betty, that when you suddenly appeared before me I thought for a minute it was just another of them—more real and vivid, but still a dream. And you are a dream, Betty, the most wonderful dream in all the world!"

"Hush, Allen," she begged, though her heart was beating suffocatingly and she hardly dared to look at him. "Everybody is staring at us."

"At you, you mean." Allen looked about fiercely at his comrades, who indeed seemed very much attracted by his pretty companion. "I see where I'll have to lick the whole camp."

Betty's laugh rippled out merrily, and Allen looked more belligerent than ever.

"Don't think I could do it, I suppose," he was beginning, when they came suddenly upon the

other members of the party, who were waiting for them.

"Betty, isn't it wonderful?" cried Mollie, lips parted, eyes shining as she slipped an arm through Betty's. "Now I want more than ever to be a soldier."

They enjoyed every minute of that hour's concert, and then felt abused because they could not have more. After that they visited the Y. M. C. A. hut, saw the officers' quarters from the outside, and otherwise amused themselves till the boys declared there was nothing more to be seen.

Then, just as the sun was sinking, the clear notes of the bugle broke in upon the evening stillness, and the girls glanced inquiringly at their escorts.

"That's retreat," Allen explained. "If you stand here, you can watch it at close quarters. Here come all the fellows. They have to stand at parade rest, left knee bent, weight on the right foot, guns held in front of them, till the old gun goes off."

"Gun?" Amy repeated questioningly, while the girls watched the ceremony with beating hearts.

"Yes. At reveille the morning gun goes off; and at retreat, the evening," Allen explained. "When you hear the gun to-night, just click your

heels and stand at attention like all the rest of us."

Boom! The girls jumped but retained presence of mind enough to stand at attention as Allen had cautioned them. The boys were standing stiff and straight as ramrods, hands at salute, their young faces grave and tense.

The band played the "Star-Spangled Banner," and never had it thrilled the girls as it thrilled them now. It brought tears to their eyes, yet they wanted to shout with pride and patriotism. Their star-spangled banner, oh, long might it wave, o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

"Allen, Allen!" cried Betty when it was all over and they had turned away, "I'm proud, so proud, just to be—an American!"

CHAPTER XIX

FLAMES

For the girls during the happy, work-filled, pleasure-filled days that followed, only one cloud darkened the horizon. That was the continued strange behavior of Will Ford.

About a week after their arrival, Grace had received a letter from him, saying that he was coming on for an indefinite stay. Betty found her friend with the letter clenched tight in one hand, while the other crushed a handkerchief into a hard little ball.

"Why, Grace, what is the matter?" Betty sat down beside her and slipped a sympathetic arm about her shoulders. "Tell me, have you had bad news?"

"No, I suppose you couldn't exactly call it that," said Grace wearily, folding up the letter and replacing it carefully in its envelope. "As a rule I'd think it was mighty good news. Will is coming to Camp Liberty."

"Oh, has he enlisted, after all?" cried Betty impulsively, and the next minute could have bitten her tongue out for her thoughtlessness.

The tears had risen to Grace's eyes and she had turned away.

"No," she said, very softly. "He hasn't enlisted."

Betty's brow puckered in bewilderment.

"Did he say why he was coming on?" she asked, not knowing just what to say.

"He said he was coming on business," Grace replied listlessly, then added, with a sudden fierce outburst of emotion: "I wish he'd stay in Deepdale. I wish, if he can't be honorable and live up to his ideals like the other boys, he wouldn't come where they are. If he is my brother, I'm ashamed——"

"Hush, Grace, hush," cried Betty soothingly, putting a firm hand over her friend's mouth. "You're all excited and worked up now or you wouldn't say such things. Didn't I tell you before that Will has his reasons? Are you going to let a friend have more faith in him than his own sister?"

"Betty Nelson," Grace began angrily, then broke down and began to sob weakly. "I can't help it," she said, as Betty tried to comfort her. "I've always loved Will so, and been so proud

of him. He's been such a good brother, too! I simply can't understand it!"

"Never mind," went on Betty soothingly, trying desperately to think of something really comforting to say. "Maybe after Will gets here he'll explain things. Till then, as my mother says, we'll just be 'canty wi' thinkin' aboot it.'"

But when the conversation was reported to the other girls, it troubled them a good deal, and they longed to solve the mystery. And when Will came he refused to be of any help whatever, keeping almost entirely to himself, and answering questions put to him vaguely, if at all. His actions became more and more mysterious, and it was absolutely impossible to make him out.

"Just leave him alone," was Allen's advice, and the girls were reluctantly obliged to follow it.

"But I wish I knew!" sighed Betty.

"Yes," was all Allen answered.

Then something happened that for a time drove the mystery from their minds. It was after a particularly long and hard day, when the girls had been entertaining at the Hostess House all morning and part of the afternoon.

Then about three or four o'clock in the afternoon, they had gone downtown to do some very necessary shopping, and had been unable to get back to dinner till seven o'clock; and that evening

the boys had arranged to take them to the theater.

By the time it was all over, and the boys had left them at the Hostess House, they were very, very tired and very, very happy.

"I never felt so sleepy in my life," said Grace, sitting down on the edge of the bed and stretching her arms above her head. "And yet we've had such a good time. If somebody doesn't give me another chocolate I won't be able to stay awake long enough to get undressed. Thanks, Amy, you always were a friend of mine."

"Well, I never laughed so much in my life," declared Mollie, pulling off her slipper and wiggling her toes contentedly. "I think it's perfectly wonderful to go out with the boys in uniform. They look so splendid and we feel so very important."

"Goodness, don't you think they feel important, too?" yawned Grace. "I know that Teddy Challenger does."

Teddy Challenger was a new-made friend of the boys, whom Allen had brought along for Amy, Will having refused to make one of the party on the plea of having important business to attend to.

"Oh, I don't know," said Betty, thoughtfully running the comb through her hair. "He seems

like a mighty nice fellow to me and the boys all like him."

"Well, Allen won't, if Teddy doesn't mind his P's and Q's," said Mollie, with a wickedly significant glance at Betty, which caused that young person to flush prettily.

"I don't even know what you mean," she announced demurely, and they all laughed at her.

"I wish you people would stop talking," Grace broke in plaintively. "I've simply got to get some sleep!"

And they slept the hearty sleep of tired girlhood till about four o'clock in the morning. Then Amy, in the room next to Betty and Mollie, rubbed her eyes, coughed a little, then sat up with a cry of alarm.

Smoke was curling thickly in around the crack in the door and the air was hot and suffocating. Somewhere the sound of crackling, snapping wood, the lurid flare of flames——

"Fire! fire!" she gasped, struggling to her feet and feeling blindly for her clothes. "Grace, Grace, wake up! Grace——" her voice rose to a scream as she saw that Grace was sleeping on.

"Oh, please, please wake up," she moaned, seizing Grace by the shoulders and shaking her wildly. "You must, you must! Grace, the house is on fire!"

Slowly the heavy eyelids opened, then Grace struggled to a sitting posture, supported by Amy's quivering arm, and gazed wildly about her. Then she sprang to her feet, swaying dizzily, and with Amy's arm still about her, they felt blindly for the door.

They found the knob at last and, after a nightmare moment when the flames roared louder, and the smoke clutched viciously at their throats, flung the door open and staggered into the hall.

A blast of heat and smoke sent them reeling back into the room. Amy closed the door with a little moan.

"The other stairs!" gasped Grace, fairly dragging her friend forward. "Maybe—it hasn't reached—them—yet——"

"There's—Mollie and—Betty," cried Amy, clutching at her throat and coughing spasmodically. In the frantic terror of the moment they had forgotten everything but their own great danger.

"We must—get—them—out!" gasped Grace, rushing into their chums' room and frantically shaking Betty, while Amy vainly tried to waken Mollie. The girls still slept on in the semblance of ordinary, healthy slumber.

"What can we do?" cried Amy hysterically. "We can't leave them here, and we can't——"

"Come on! We've got to—get some—help!" Grace fumbled for the knob and finally succeeded in getting the door opened.

As they had hoped, the stairway at the rear of the house was still intact, although the smoke was so dense they had to feel every inch of the way.

Oh, the nightmare of it! Long years afterward the girls would live it over again in their dreams, and wake up drenched in perspiration, quivering and shaking with terror.

When they finally reached the outer air they were smoke begrimed, wild-eyed and the tears were rolling down their faces unnoticed and unchecked.

The fire, which had started inside, and had gained a good foothold before any trace of it could be seen from the outside, had been discovered by one of the guards, who had immediately sent in an alarm. Already the shriek of the fire engine could be heard, soldiers were being hurried out from the barracks to help in the rescue work, and all was noise and confusion.

A group of women who had escaped from the house before the girls, and who stood huddled together in a terrified group, rushed forward at sight of them, and gathered about them eagerly.

But Grace was not to be detained. She pushed ruthlessly past the women, and ran to intercept

a group of firemen who were rushing down upon them.

"Two girls," she gasped, catching one of them by the arm and holding on desperately. "At the head of the stairs—unconscious—get them——"

And then Grace, who had done her gallant best, tumbled down in a little heap, having fainted.

CHAPTER XX

THE RESCUE

ALLEN, rushing up with his company, gave one quick glance at the group of women and girls before the burning house, then strode grimly over to Amy's side.

"Where's Betty?" he demanded roughly, his voice sounding strange, even to himself.

"Allen, Allen, they've gone to rescue her," cried Amy, shaking like a leaf. "She's still in the house——"

With a hoarse cry Allen turned, and ran like a madman toward the burning building. A fireman, stumbling gaspingly from the house, almost knocked him down.

"Isn't any use!" he cried. "That stair's on fire, too. We've got to reach 'em from the outside."

"Get out of the way!" cried Allen, shoving him roughly to one side.

The fireman called after him, but there was no stopping the terror that forced him on. Terror

for Betty—up there alone—Betty—Betty. He clapped a hand before his eyes and stumbled blindly on.

Flames lapped at him hungrily as he forced his mad way through them, smoke choked him, blinded him, and yet he must go on. Betty—Betty . . . A section of the stairs gave way before him and he had to jump to keep from going with it.

Was this the head of the stairs? He felt for it with his hand and pulled it back with an involuntary cry of pain. He was horribly burned, his hands, his face, his hair—his clothing had started. He beat at them as he ran. He must live until he had rescued Betty—and then——

A door. Fumblingly he opened it—then forced it shut from the other side. Blindly he felt for the bed. Yes, she was here. Thank God he had found her! But there was another figure—someone else to save.

Then he felt a sharp pain. He looked down and found that the flames were rapidly creeping up—creeping up . . . There was a rug on the floor—with feverish haste he wrapped himself in it—smothering the flames. He must live until——

He staggered to his feet, lifted one of the unconscious figures in his arms and staggered with

it to the door. A hades of flame leaped at him. It was too late. They were trapped!

He groaned aloud and great tears rolled down his face. Betty—Betty! Carefully he laid his burden down and staggered to the open window.

The firemen were raising a ladder to another window. He beckoned to them, he shouted to them in a hoarse voice that seemed to him to make no noise at all.

But they saw him and shifted the ladder to his window. Was there a chance, after all? The flames were eating away the door, were leaping into the room. Down below the firemen had stretched a net.

Sobbing now, his breath coming in great gasps, Allen rushed back to the bed, picked up one of the figures, and staggered with it back to the window. They saw him standing there, and a great cheer went up from the spectators.

Gathering all that wonderful reserve strength that comes to every one in time of greatest need, he swung his burden far out from the window—then dropped it.

Allen paused for a moment, steadying hand on the windowsill, then gathered himself for the last great effort. The bed was invisible now, the room an inferno—he had to fight every step of the way

back to the bed. Then he found what he sought, and fought the slow fight back to the window.

But his strength was going—going—his arms were iron weights—the room was going black. With a great effort he fought off the faintness. Then he saw a great, helmeted head peering in at him from the window.

"Give her to me, son," said a hearty voice; then, it seemed to Allen miraculously, he was relieved of his burden. Swaying, dizzy, he clung to the windowsill to keep himself erect.

"Now I guess I can die," he heard himself saying, through an eternity of space.

"You just hold tight, son," said the hearty voice, as its owner carefully lowered himself and the poor little unconscious figure down the ladder. "I'll be back for you in jig time."

But it was an eternity while Allen waited, every nerve tense in the fight for consciousness, red hot irons searing his flesh, that roaring hades of flames creeping closer, closer——

"Your turn, son!"

Dimly he saw the helmeted head through a haze of smoke and tried to speak—but no sound came from between his cracked, parched lips. He swayed. A brawny arm gripped him like a vise.

"Can you climb out," asked the voice, "or will I have to carry you?"

"ALLEN!" SHE CRIED, DRAWING A CHAIR TO THE BED-SIDE.

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Allen's head jerked up proudly, and he forced still a little more from that splendid reserve of strength. Afterward he could never remember how he clambered over that windowsill, and got his feet upon the ladder.

That he did it and managed the descent with the aid of the firemen, he afterward learned from his friends. All he could remember, was the great shout which came to him like a little murmur that went up from the crowd at sight of him.

He was a hero, a great hero, but at the time the fact interested him not at all. He wanted to sleep—to sleep—if they would only let him sleep!

Four days later, he awoke and looked around him lazily. A delightful drowsiness surrounded him; he was too comfortable even to inquire where he was.

Then a sweet voice reached his ears and he turned his head sharply.

"No, thank you," it said. "I think I'll take these to him myself, if you don't mind. This door? Thank you."

Fascinated, Allen watched the door as it slowly opened, admitting—Betty! Betty, sweeter and more beautiful than he had ever seen her. Her eyes widened at sight of him, and she ran forward impulsively.

"Allen!" she cried, drawing a chair to the bed-

side and taking his outstretched hand. "Oh, I'm so glad! I was afraid you were just going to sleep on forever. How do you feel?"

"Not at all," he responded whimsically, his eyes devouring her face. "I haven't been awake long enough to feel anything—except your hand in mine," he added softly.

She thoughtfully regarded the hand he still held, yet did not try to draw it away. Instead she smiled a little—a smile that set Allen's heart to throbbing painfully, and said, so softly he could hardly hear her:

"Aren't you just a little bit curious to know what I think of you—and everybody else, for that matter—after what you did the other day?"

"Yes, what do you think of me?" he asked breathlessly. "I've wanted ever since I can remember, to know that."

"I think," said Betty, flushing, yet meeting his eager eyes steadily, "you're the dearest and most wonderful person I ever knew."

"Betty," he cried hoarsely and would have leaped from the bed had she not forcibly restrained him. "Oh, Betty, Betty," he murmured over and over again. "Did you mean that—did you?"

"I—I'm not the only one," said Betty, startled at what she had done. "Everybody is talking

about you and praising you to the skies, and there was even a piece about you in the paper. I—I'm afraid when you are able to get out and hear how everybody is raving about you, you'll be spoiled entirely."

"Betty," he commanded, in so very different a tone from any he had ever used before that she started and looked at him shyly, "what are you running on about such nonsense for? If I did anything, it was for you and because I loved you, Betty. There wasn't any heroism. I don't deserve any fuss about it and I don't want any thanks. I don't deserve any. You weren't hurt, Betty?"

"No," she answered softly, not daring to look at him. This was such a different Allen and so wonderfully attractive. "Mollie and I were both a little sick from the smoke and shock, but it didn't take us long to recover. You were the one who was so terribly burned that for one horrible long day, the doctors didn't know whether you'd pull through or not. Oh, Allen, that awful day!"

"Were you worried?" queried Allen gently.

"I—I never want to live through another one like it," she said with a little shiver, then suddenly rose to go. "The doctor said you mustn't be excited," she explained as he looked up at her re-

proachfully. "And I," she looked away again, "I just wanted to—thank you, Allen—but if you won't let me——"

"Betty," he broke in, an eager light of daring in his eyes, "I know it's sort of taking advantage—but—there's just one way you can—thank me. Won't you—please——"

Slowly his meaning dawned upon Betty, and the color flamed into her face. Then, light as thistledown, her lips brushed his cheek and she was gone, closing the door softly behind her.

With wildly beating heart Allen pressed a hand to his cheek and gazed longingly after her.

"Betty," he whispered. "Oh, my Betty!"

CHAPTER XXI

ALLEN A HERO

"Gee, Allen, but you're a lucky boy!"

It was Sunday afternoon, and the young folks had hired two automobiles for a trip out into the country. It was more than two weeks since the fire, and all but Allen had completely recovered from it. He, however, still felt a little "wabbly," so the boys and girls had conferred together, deciding that an automobile trip was just what he needed to complete his recovery.

Now at Roy's rather vague remark about his luck, he turned to him inquiringly.

"In just what way?" he asked. "I rather thought I was running out of it lately."

"Gee," said Roy, waxing excited, "do you call it hard luck to get a chance at being a hero, twice in three months, and have all the girls falling down and worshiping you, and all the old ladies patting you on the back——"

"I imagine that wouldn't have been particularly soothing," interrupted Grace, reaching, as

always, for the ever-present candy box, "especially with poor Allen's back in the condition it was."

"Yes," said Allen with a grimace, "if anybody'd started to patting me at that time, I'd have returned pat for pat—only mine wouldn't have been gentle. Two cents for your thoughts, Betty. You haven't said a word all the way."

"Goodness, has the price of thoughts gone up with everything else?" queried Mollie, snatching a candy from under Grace's very nose. "Nobody ever offered me more than a penny for mine."

"Probably they weren't worth it," said Roy, to be promptly subdued by a look from Mollie's black eyes. "As I was saying," he continued, hastily changing the subject. "I'd consider myself in luck if I'd rescued two beautiful damsels——"

"They'd be the lucky ones," interrupted Mollie, with a smile.

"From a burning building," he continued, undaunted. "It certainly was dramatic, Allen, old chap—we have to hand it to you."

"I felt anything but dramatic at the time," said Allen ruefully. "The funny part of it is that I've always had a secret longing to do something of the sort—just to get the sensation. That," he paused dramatically, "cured me!"

"I should think it would cure most anybody," said Mollie with a grimace. "Neither Betty or I are particularly light weights. I don't see how you managed it, Allen—in the heat and the smoke and everything."

"Managed it," scoffed Roy. "Why, it isn't every fellow has the chance to hold two beauteous maidens in his arms——"

"Still I might have picked out a more appropriate place," said Allen whimsically.

"Tell me something, Frank," said Grace, taking another piece of candy and looking her prettiest at him.

"Anything," he answered promptly.

"Under the same conditions, would you have rushed into a burning house—to save me?"

"Would I?" he replied with a fervor that made Grace jump and the rest laugh. "You just give me a chance; that's all. I'll show you!"

"Goodness!" exclaimed Betty, twinkling. "I'll be afraid to sleep with Grace any more. She's apt to set the place on fire just to see what happens."

"Good-bye, I'm going away from here," said Mollie, making a pretense of clambering out of the machine. "One fire is just about enough for me. Let me go, Roy Anderson—don't you dare to hold me."

"Couldn't do anything pleasanter," said Roy cheerfully, at which Grace held up her hands in pretended horror.

"Heavens, everybody's getting sentimental," she cried. "If we don't stop it, we'll just ruin everything, that's all. Look out for that dog, Frank!"

"That's another thing we almost ruined," grinned Frank, as the wheel just grazed the hind leg of the cur. "Dogs are the curse of tourists, anyway. If I had my way, they'd all be shot."

Amy screamed and clapped her hand to her ears.

"Frank, how can you say such things?" she cried, adding plaintively, "I never saw such people, anyway. You can't talk for five minutes without saying something about people being shot."

"But we were speaking of animals," said Frank politely.

"Same thing," murmured Mollie.

"Speak for yourself, please," he retorted amiably, swerving the car at a perilous angle about a turn in the road. "Say, this is pretty country along here, isn't it?"

They all agreed that it was, and for a few minutes sat in silent enjoyment of it.

While the Hostess House was in process of repair some friendly families living in the vicinity

had opened their doors wide to the girls and the other visitors at the Hostess House. The fire had done a great deal of damage, but the house had been amply insured, and the work of rebuilding was proceeding as fast as possible. Meanwhile, the girls were going on with their work as usual, though eagerly looking forward to the time when they should be installed in their proper quarters again.

The fire had temporarily put the subject of Will and his mysterious doings out of their minds, but during the last few days their wonder and curiosity had returned.

To-day he had consented to accompany them, and during the early part of the ride had seemed in hilarious spirits. Now, for the last fifteen minutes or so, he had appeared gloomy and preoccupied, but as they neared the spot where they had decided to eat their lunch, his spirits seemed to revive somewhat, and he became talkative again.

"Say, I'm hungry," he announced, more like the old Will than he had been for weeks. "What are you girls going to give us, anyway?"

"Chicken," announced Betty, "and honey and biscuits, and peach cake and jelly, and hot coffee from the thermos bottle, some ham sandwiches and deviled eggs——"

"Stop her," pleaded Roy piteously. "Stop her, some one, before I forget myself and decamp with the hamper——"

"You'd be forgetting us too, if you tried it," said Frank grimly. "Do you suppose with three ravenous wolves at your back you'd have a chance of getting away with any of that kind of stuff?"

"Gee, it's awful the appetite camp life gives you," said Roy mournfully. "I wrote home the other day and told the folks that if I ate like a wolf before, I eat like a flock of 'em, now."

"Whoever heard of a flock of wolves?" asked Mollie scornfully. "You must have been thinking of geese."

"No," retorted Roy soberly. "I wasn't speaking of you."

"Strike one for our side," chuckled Allen, while the others laughed at Mollie's look of surprise. "That was a good one, Roy—right from the shoulder."

"Now I *know* I'm going home," said Mollie forlornly. "Everybody's agin me."

"I'm not," said Betty, putting an arm about her. "The more they try to down you, the more I love you."

"If that's the way you feel," put in Allen whimsically, "won't everybody please jump on me at once?"

"Yes, I always had a weakness for the under dog," Betty was beginning wickedly when Mollie drew sharply away from her, and the others began to laugh.

"Betty Nelson," said Mollie reproachfully, "I never expected it of you. Under dog, indeed——"

"Oh, I didn't mean you!" said Betty hurriedly, thereby increasing the general mirth.

"Oh, well, what does it matter, anyway?" said Frank philosophically, as he swung the car around a curve, and brought it to a standstill. "I won't mind being an under dog or anything else as long as I get my share of the eats. Don't you think this is rather a pretty spot to have lunch?"

"I know a better spot to *put* it, though," said Roy jocularly, as they sprang out upon the soft grass by the roadside. "And if I have my way it won't be long getting there."

Instinctively, Betty held out a hand to Allen, as he descended more slowly than the rest—she was very anxious about his "wabbliness."

Allen took the little hand eagerly, but it is doubtful if he gained much physical support from it.

"How are you feeling?" asked Betty as they followed the others up the grassy slope to a sort of ledge—just the kind of place for a picnic

lunch. She did not look at him. Somehow, it was almost impossible to look at Allen, these days.

"Happy," he answered, in reply to her question. "Just being near you, Betty, makes me the happiest fellow on earth!"

CHAPTER XXII

MAKING GOOD

It was raining torrents outside, and the girls were seated in one of the big parlors of the Hostess House. As usual, they were knitting, and their tongues kept time to the rapid click, click, of their needles.

They were exceptionally thoughtful and, as Amy expressed it, "their mood matched the weather." The war was not going as well as every one had hoped. The dark cloud was growing darker and darker every day, and each morning paper seemed to bring more disquieting news than the one before.

"And it won't be long now," Mollie was saying, "before our boys are sent across. It's almost time for the second draft, and the camps will have to be emptied of the first troops. And when they're gone——" she bowed her head to hide the unbidden tears that were glistening in her eyes.

"Yes, it will be terrible," said Betty, trying

hard to keep the telltale tremulousness from her voice—trying desperately to sound brave and resigned. "But we must remember that thousands of women and girls all over the United States are going through the same thing. And for the boys' sake, we must be cheerful."

"The boys themselves are cheerful—heaven bless them," cried Grace, in a rare burst of enthusiasm. "I never saw anything like their spirit!"

"Isn't it wonderful?" Mollie agreed, her eyes shining through her tears. "It makes you want to shout with pride in them, and cry at the same time."

"Yes," said Amy quietly, "and I don't think anybody who hasn't been close to military life, as we have been, can realize how great the American army will be. It's meeting the boys day after day, seeing them get more enthusiastic as the time comes near for them to face those terrible guns——"

"I feel as if I wanted to go down on my knees to every boy in uniform," cried Betty, gripping the arms of her chair till the knuckles showed white. "No matter how hard we try we can't make up to them for what they're giving up—and giving up so cheerfully. And they're so dear and appreciative and thankful for every little

thing that we have done for them, it makes me want to cry.

"And have you noticed," she continued, while the girls stopped their work to watch her, "what happens if you ask them about their home folks? Their faces light up, and right away they begin to talk about 'mother.'

" 'You know,' one of them said to me just a little while ago, 'when I first came to camp, I didn't exactly feel homesick, as I'd expected to; I just felt queer and uneasy and restless. For a couple of nights I couldn't sleep, just kept tossing and turning till reveille routed me out again. Then suddenly, one night, I found out what the matter was. I wasn't homesick; I was just missing my mother.'

"I smiled at him, trying my best not to cry, and said: 'Home is mother, isn't it?'

"Then the boy just turned away, and I knew it was because his eyes were misty and he was ashamed to let me see it, and when he looked at me again he was smiling a little wistfully.

"A few days after that he came up to me. 'You won't laugh, if I tell you something?' he asked. 'On my word of honor,' I answered him. 'Well,' he said, looking so dear and sheepish, I had all I could do to keep from hugging him, 'as soon as I found out what you said about home being

mother, I just put the picture I had of her under my pillow, and honest, I've slept like a baby ever since.' "

The girls were all crying and Mollie impatiently shook a tear from the tip of her nose. "Betty, you never told us that before. If his mother could only know about it."

"She probably does," said Betty, wiping her eyes and taking up her knitting again. "Somehow, most mothers know those things by instinct."

"And to think boys like that," cried Mollie, knitting fast to keep time with her feelings, "to think boys like that have to go over to the other side, and be mowed down by the thousands. Oh, I can't believe it!"

"I guess we've all sort of closed our eyes to it, till now," said Grace, so unlike her usual self that she had completely forgotten to eat candy for fifteen minutes. "But we can't go on like that forever. When it comes right down to us and we lose somebody we care for——" her voice broke and the girls went on knitting faster than ever, fearing a general breakdown.

"We've just got to work so hard we can't think," said Mollie with decision, adding, a little hysterically: "It never used to be hard before."

"What, to keep from thinking?" asked Amy,

while the other girls smiled a little and felt better.

"Who's that coming up the walk, Betty?" Grace asked, a moment later. "The glimpse I got looked like a uniform."

"It's Allen," Betty answered, waving to the splendid specimen of manhood who was coming up the porch two steps at a time. "He looks as if he had some good news for us. You let him in, will you, Amy? You're nearest the door."

So Amy, opening the door, admitted a six-foot cyclone, who swept her before him into the parlor, where she sank into a chair to get her breath.

"Well, what in the world?" asked Mollie, round eyes on his face, as he mopped his face and lowered himself into a seat.

"Talk about good luck," he began, beaming round upon them. "I guess the fellows were right when they said I was falling into it lately."

"Good news, Allen?" asked Betty, leaning forward eagerly. "I knew you had something wonderful to tell us the moment I saw you."

"Well, in the first place," said Allen, modestly putting himself last, "Frank has been promoted to the rank of corporal."

"Oh, isn't that wonderful!" they cried together, and thereafter arose a very babel of questions as to where, when and how the promotion

had occurred, which Allen answered one after another with equal enthusiasm.

"Frank's taken hold and worked with all his heart," he finished, "and he simply got what's coming to him, that's all."

"But, Allen," Betty broke in, struck by a sudden thought, "you said something about *your* having run into good luck. Was it something that happened to you personally, or was it just the good luck of being the friend of a corporal?"

"Since I've been a corporal myself from the start," said Allen with dignity, "I don't see why——"

"Yes, yes, go on," said Mollie impatiently.

"Well," said Allen, throwing the news like a bomb into their midst, "I've been promoted to a sergeant."

"What?" the girls cried, hardly knowing whether to believe him or not. "Are you really in earnest?"

"You're not very complimentary," he grumbled, though his eyes twinkled. "You don't suppose I'd come here and tell you a thing like that if it weren't so, do you?"

Then arose a second babel, louder and more prolonged than the first, and it was a long time before they quieted down enough to talk coherently.

"You see," Allen explained, "there's a chance for promotion now that there never was before. New men are coming in by the hundreds, and those men have to have officers. There's really no end to the chances if you just stick to the big game and do your level best. You're sure to win something good in the end."

"And hasn't Roy been promoted?" asked Grace. "Hasn't he been 'on the job,' as you say?"

"You bet your life he has," Allen defended loyally. "It's just our luck that we happened to get it; that's all. His turn will come next, you take it from me."

For a few minutes no one spoke, and only the ticking of the clock, and the regular click, click of the knitting needles broke the deep stillness. Then Allen bethought him of something.

"Saw Will, too, on the way up," he said, and at the name the girls all put down their knitting and looked at him inquiringly. "He seemed to be immensely excited about something. Fact is, I don't think he would even have seen me if I hadn't gotten in his way and flagged him. Mark my words—that boy's got something big up his sleeve. I bet he's going to surprise us all some day."

"Did he—did he—tell you anything?" asked Grace. "Anything to make you think that?"

"No," he answered, adding with a sincerity that brought a light of unutterable gladness to Grace's eyes: "But I've met lots of fellows in my business, and have learned to size them up pretty well. And if there was ever a brainy, plucky, true-blue fellow in this world, his name is Will Ford!"

CHAPTER XXIII

JUST FRIENDS

"HERE comes the sun," cried Betty, "the sun, the sun, the beautiful sun."

"Well, I should say it was just about time," said Grace, carefully arranging her hat before the mirror. "If it hadn't cleared up pretty soon, I'd have stopped hoping. Are the other girls nearly ready?"

"Oh, we've been ready and waiting for hours," came Mollie's voice, slightly bored, from the other room. "And we took our time, too, because we knew how long you are getting dressed——"

"Oh, is that so?" Grace was beginning, when Betty interrupted peaceably.

"Well, we're all ready now. In the words of the army—'let's go.'"

"Oh, it is lovely out!" cried Mollie, drawing in deep breaths of the invigorating air, as they stood on the steps looking down the street. "I feel like walking miles and miles and miles."

As the four girls walked down to the main gate of the cantonment, they nodded and smiled continually to the khaki-clad, respectfully-saluting boys they passed; for the fame of the girls at the Hostess House had spread all over the barracks, and the boys always looked forward to catching a smile or two or a merry word as they passed.

Many there were who had been sentimentally inclined, but the Deepdale boys had well nigh monopolized the girls from their home town and by their actions had warned off all would-be intruders almost as plainly as though they had put out a sign.

There were some hardy souls, however, who refused to recognize any prior claim, and these had caused much grumbling among the Deepdale boys.

"I wonder what will happen when we have to go across," Frank had said once. "I suppose then those chaps will think they have it all their own way."

And the bright faces of the girls had clouded so suddenly and they had looked so distressed that poor Frank never dared repeat the offense.

But stopping every few minutes to speak to some one you know, necessarily makes progress slow, and it was some time before the girls suc-

ceeded in reaching the gate and turning their steps toward the country.

"It doesn't seem possible that Thanksgiving can be so near," said Amy thoughtfully. "I never knew time to run away so."

"Yes, it makes me feel dizzy sometimes," said Mollie, with a little perplexed frown. "I feel as if I wanted to get hold of him by the forelock and hold him back. He's in altogether too much of a hurry."

"If we can only see that each one of the boys who can't go home for Thanksgiving gets a regular, old-fashioned home-cooked dinner," said Betty earnestly, "I'll feel as if we'd done some good in the world."

"Well, more than half the boys will be able to get home for it," said Grace, "and I'm sure we'll find enough good-hearted families to account for the rest."

"Yes, the people around here have certainly helped us more than we dared to hope," said Betty enthusiastically. "We've hardly found one so far who wasn't willing to open his house—and his heart, too, for that matter—to the soldier boys. I love them all for being so generous. It's done more than anything else to keep up the boys' spirits and send them away happy and healthy and confident."

"Where are we going first?" queried Mollie, for Betty had made out a list of the houses they were to canvass.

"The Shroths come first," she answered, consulting her list. "Then the Atwaters and the Clarks. After that we'll just go up one street and down the other till supper time."

"Sounds simple," said Amy plaintively, "but, oh, our poor feet!"

"We have walked a good deal, lately," laughed Betty. "But it's nothing to what we *have* done. Champion hikers like us shouldn't complain about ordinary walking. Here we are at the Shroths. Now look your prettiest and smile your sweetest for the sake of the soldier boys!"

Mrs. Shroth, a sweet-faced, elderly woman, opened the door to them herself and smilingly ushered them into the handsome library.

"I saw you coming, my dears," she said, settling down comfortably in an enveloping armchair, "and I'm almost sure I know what you have come to ask me. And you needn't even ask," she added, raising her hand as Betty started to speak, "for the request was granted two weeks ago. My whole house is at your disposal—to do with as you please."

"Oh, you're lovely," Betty cried impulsively, and Mrs. Shroth gently covered the eager young

hand on the chair arm with her own, smiling down into the flushed face.

"The admiration is mutual," she said, and then Betty's heart went out to her entirely. "I've watched you girls for a long time, and the work you've done for the boys has been simply splendid. I've tried to help all I could——"

"You have," broke in Mollie enthusiastically. "And we've been so grateful to you."

"And I've been grateful to you," Mrs. Shroth added, in her sweet voice, "for showing me how best I could serve the boys and my country. Now, how many do you think I could accommodate for Thanksgiving dinner—or rather, how many would you like me to accommodate?"

Betty was a little at a loss.

"Why, I hardly know," she said, hesitating. "We didn't expect you to take in more than two, perhaps three at the outside——"

"Oh, nonsense," said Mrs. Shroth, brushing the suggestion aside. "Two or three boys would be lost in this big house, even counting all my relatives who usually spend Thanksgiving day with me. No, I can take half a dozen, at least."

The girls looked at her a moment, delighted, but incredulous. Then they told Mrs. Shroth what they thought of such generosity until she found herself blushing with pleasure.

"It's such a little thing," she said, as she stood on the porch to say good-bye to them, "that I feel almost guilty to take thanks for it. Good luck."

The girls went on down the street with singing hearts and a warm sense of friendliness and love for all their fellow beings.

They found the same spirit in every house they visited, and when they at last started for home after walking "miles and miles" they were too happy to feel tired.

"Oh, every one's so kind and dear and anxious to help," cried Mollie, skipping a little in her delight, "that your heart just feels too big to stay inside. Seems as if it ought to come out in the open where everybody can see how hard it's beating."

"Well, I have heard of people wearing their hearts on their sleeves," said Betty, twinkling. "But I've never tried it myself."

"It's wonderful," said Amy softly, "what a comfortable, warm feeling it gives you to find people—some of them you never knew before—who are really working side by side with you for the same thing, ready to hold out a helping hand when you need it."

"Yes," agreed Betty, her eyes fixed dreamily on the horizon, "it makes you feel as if there

weren't any strangers in the world, as if we were all just friends, working for the common good of everybody."

"Betty, how pretty," cried Grace, and there was a thrill in her voice as she repeated softly; "all just friends, working for the common good of everybody."

"I'll never forget one thing that happened to me," said Amy, and they looked at her lovingly. Amy was such a dear—but then everybody was that to-night! "It was only a little thing, and yet it made me think."

"Then it couldn't have been very little," Mollie, the irrepressible, murmured.

"You know," Amy went on, so deep in her own thoughts, she scarcely noticed the interruption, "I never did talk much—I always felt as if people were cold and unfriendly—and so kept to myself, except for my really good friends, of course. Then, one morning, I saw that it was all my own fault.

"I just happened to be walking along the street, not noticing anybody particularly, when an old woman dropped her nickel car fare and it rolled out into the middle of the street. I ran after it and gave it back to her, and she smiled at me. Somehow, that smile changed everything for me."

"How, dear?" asked Betty, putting a sympathetic arm about her.

"Why," said Amy, blushing in her enthusiasm, "it just made me feel as if everybody was ready to smile if you only gave them half a chance. And I've found out it was true," she finished decidedly. "Because I've tried it ever so many times since, and it's never once failed!"

"Yes," concluded Mollie. "I guess everybody's just plain nice and human, after all!"

CHAPTER XXIV

CAPTIVE AND CAPTORS

"Girls," Betty clutched Mollie by the arm and spoke in a tense undertone, "isn't that the spy?"

The girls gasped, looked, and set off on a dead run. The spy's back was to them. He seemed to be waiting for somebody and he did not see the girls till they were almost upon him.

Then, with an exclamation, he dodged around the corner of the house and commenced to run like a deer.

"Amy!" gasped Betty, as they pursued, fleet of foot, "you go to the camp for help! I'll try to cut him off!"

With the strategy of a general, Betty dodged a couple of dirt piles—it was a row of small houses, in process of construction near the camp—slipped across between two of the houses and did actually succeed in cutting the spy off.

She caught a fleeting glimpse of him as he dodged into a doorway with the evident intention of hiding till they got tired of the hunt.

Also, it was certain he had not seen Betty and had no idea that she had seen him.

With wildly beating heart, but no thought of turning back, the Little Captain picked up a big piece of wood that could serve excellently as a weapon and ran for the doorway through which the spy had disappeared.

Cautiously she opened the door, and the next moment thought her heart would stop beating altogether as she took in the situation. The man was fumbling desperately with the knob of the inside door. Evidently it was locked. He had fallen into a trap!

Breathlessly Betty closed the door and leaned her full weight upon it. If the girls would only come! They might together manage to hold it. But alone——

"Betty, Betty, where are you?" cried a voice close at hand and the Little Captain gave a gasp of dismay. As long as the man had not known he was trapped, there might be a chance that he would remain quiet, hoping they would pass without thinking to look into the house. But now! Some one was pushing against the other side of the door. He was trying to get out!

"Hurry!" she cried agonizedly as Mollie and Grace ran up to her. "Put your weight against the door—quick."

So used were they to obeying her without question that they threw their full weight upon the door, bracing and holding with all their might.

"He's in there," gasped Betty. "I've sent Amy for help. If we can hold on—just a few minutes——"

The man was hurling himself against the door with all the force of desperation, but the girls had not spent most of their life in the open for nothing. They held on gallantly, though in their hearts they knew that if help were very long in coming, there could be but one answer. They were three against one, it is true, but then they were girls and he was a man, and a desperate man.

"Oh, why does it take her so long?" Grace cried after one particularly vigorous lunge which it had taken all their combined strength to withstand. "I don't think we can keep this up much longer——"

"Hush," gasped Betty, "I thought I heard voices."

"Oh, I hope you did!"

They listened breathlessly for a moment—then the wonderful truth dawned. Help was coming, and coming swiftly! There was no sound, save the regular thud-thud of running feet, but the most beautiful music in the world would have

had no charms in comparison with that rhythmic sound.

Their prisoner must have heard it too, for he redoubled his efforts to escape and they had to turn all of their attention to the holding of the door.

"If they should come too late!" gasped Mollie.

"Don't talk," hissed Betty, through clenched teeth. "We've got to hold him."

And they did!

A moment later several guards, headed by a man not in uniform, came in sight around the corner of the building and as Will afterward expressed it "the game was all over but the shouting."

For it was Will who headed the relief party and took charge of the capture. And so excited were the girls, that they forgot even to wonder until it was all over.

Adolph Hensler was not easy to handle, even after he found himself looking into the muzzles of two loaded revolvers. Even then he tried to escape and the guard was forced to shoot a couple of bullets over his head before he was scared into submission.

The girls walked home behind captive and captors, too breathless and excited even to think. They had not gone far before they met Amy com-

ing toward them, trembling all over from fatigue and excitement.

"They got him, didn't they?" she asked, linking her arm through Betty's and biting her lip to keep it steady. "I was so afraid they would be too late."

"So were we," said Grace, examining a big black and blue bruise on her arm. "We could have held out just about a minute longer."

"How did you do it, Amy?" cried Mollie. "Did you have to go all the way back to camp to find help?"

"No, I met it coming," she answered.

They stared at her incredulously.

"I was about half way to camp," she explained, "when I saw Will and the three soldiers coming toward me. When I had managed to gasp out what I'd come for they didn't say a word—just put on full speed and ran."

"Mighty lucky for us they did," said Mollie, but Betty interrupted eagerly.

"Doesn't it seem strange to you," she said, "that an armed guard should be coming in this direction just when we needed them? And that Will should be at the head of them?"

"Why, Betty, what do you mean?" Mollie was beginning when Grace interrupted.

"Oh, do you think it can be true?" she cried,

seeing Betty's meaning and clinging to it desperately. "Oh, Betty, Betty, if it only is!"

"What are you talking about?" cried Mollie impatiently. "Can what be what?"

"Let's wait," said Betty, quickening her pace, "and let Will tell the story!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED

After dinner in the living-room of the Hostess House, a snapping, dancing, crackling fire in the grate, and the girls gathered in an expectant semi-circle about it.

They were nervous, too, for every once in a while one of them would get up, look out the window, throw an extra log upon the fire and sit down again with a "why-don't-they-come?" look of impatience upon her face.

A ring at the door bell!

"I'll answer it," cried Betty, jumping up and nearly overturning a chair in her eagerness. When she returned a couple of minutes later, her face held a look of unutterable disgust.

"Only one of the guests," she said, as the girls looked up eagerly. "I was sure that must be the boys."

"They're terribly late," grumbled Mollie, kicking an overturned edge of the rug into place, as if even that small vent to her feelings was a re-

lief. "They'll be all talked out before they get here."

Another ring at the door bell!

This time there was no mistake. A chorus of excited voices greeted Betty as she opened the door for them and a moment later the boys burst into the living-room, fairly exhaling importance. The girls welcomed them eagerly and drew up more chairs before the fire.

"Gee, but we've had some time," cried Allen, fairly panting from exertion and excitement. "If you girls were heroines before, you're more than ever so, now."

"But where's Will?" asked Grace, with that old, anxious look. "I thought he was coming with you."

"He is," Frank answered her. "But he was summoned to a very important conference with the colonel——"

"The colonel!" they cried incredulously, while Grace stamped her foot with impatience.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Just that," he answered, enjoying their mystification too much to enlighten them at once. "When he received the order he told us fellows to come on over and he'd join us as soon as he could break away."

"Oh, Allen, please tell me what it all means."

Grace was fairly crying with excitement and eagerness. "Please don't keep me waiting any longer!"

"I'm sorry, Grace—I didn't think," said Allen, in quick compunction. "It means," he added, with a ring of pride in his voice, "that Will is what we always believed him to be—one of the finest fellows that ever lived. I'm proud to be called his friend!"

"Oh, Allen!" Grace felt blindly for a handkerchief and Betty slipped it into her hand. "Oh, Allen,——"

"But what did he do?" demanded Mollie impatiently. "You haven't gotten to the point yet."

"Well," Allen continued, while Betty put a sympathetic arm about her friend and snuggled close, "all the time we were wondering down in our hearts why Will didn't enlist—although we never doubted he had good reasons," he added hastily, "he was really working harder, spending more time and energy for the government than we ever thought of spending. There's one important thing we forgot—that Will was a secret service man!"

"Oh!" cried Betty, her eyes gleaming in the firelight, "now, I know I guessed right!"

"What did you guess?" asked Allen, remembering to marvel, even in that moment of excitement,

how very becoming firelight was to Betty! "Out with it."

"Why," said Betty, leaning forward eagerly, "after Amy told us that she had met Will and the soldiers half way to the spot where we found the spy, I seemed to see the whole thing as plainly as if some one had told it to me.

"I remembered Will's special interest in the spy the first time we met Adolph Hensler on Pine Island—then how, soon after we saw him here again, Will wrote Grace that he was coming on. That would seem as though he were hot on his trail——"

"He was," said Allen, while the others hung on every word.

"Well, the rest is simple," said Betty. "I suppose that Will kept on shadowing him till he got what he wanted. He was on his way to capture the spy, while we were hanging on to the door, praying for help. Oh, it all fits together like parts of a puzzle!"

"You're a wonder, Betty!" said Allen, while the others drew a deep breath, trying to take it all in. "But there was one little bit, or rather, I should say, big bit, of cleverness on Will's part that neither you nor anybody else could guess at. You remember the code letter we picked up that night on Pine Island?"

"Yes," they cried eagerly.

"Well, Will had the code deciphered and found out who wrote the document. It proved, by the way, that Adolph Hensler is one of the most dangerous and most wanted German spies in this country."

"And what else?" cried Mollie, who could never wait for the end of a story.

"The clever part of it," Allen continued, leaning forward, very handsome and eager in the firelight, "was Will's copying of the handwriting on the envelope."

"Sure," chuckled Roy. "I told him I wouldn't be surprised to see him start a life of crime any time now."

"Surely no experienced forger could have done it better," Allen agreed whimsically, while the girls waited with unconcealed impatience. "Anyway, he wrote a short note—a decoy—to Adolph in this handwriting, requesting an interview at the very spot where you girls came upon him."

"Oh!" cried Betty, in dismay. "Then it would have been better if we'd left him alone. We took a chance of spoiling all Will's well-laid plans."

"How could it have been better?" asked Allen. "Will started out to capture him and found you girls had beat him to it, that's all."

"Yes and they might have had a good deal

more trouble rounding him up than you did," put in Frank. "From what Will tells us, you girls sure did do a neat job."

The girls flushed with pleasure, but Mollie, being truthful to a fault, put an arm about Betty and told where most of the credit was actually due.

"Why, it was Betty who thought of cutting him off," she said, while Betty vainly tried to stop her. "No, I'm going to tell the truth! And it was Betty that really captured him. She saw him go in the door, followed him, and was holding on for dear life when we came upon her."

"Yes, and how long would I have been able to hold on, I'd like to know," protested the Little Captain vigorously, "if you girls hadn't come along just then. No, sir, if there's any credit at all, it's got to be divided equally among us!"

"You'll be surprised to see how much credit everybody's giving you," chuckled Roy. "When you make your next debut into society, I wouldn't be surprised if they greeted you with brass bands."

"Goodness, I wish they would," cried Mollie eagerly. "For the first time in my life, I'd have a chance to feel like a regular soldier!"

"But Will is the real hero," said Betty quietly. "To go on working for your country, taking a

chance on having people think things of you that you don't deserve, that sort of thing is the real heroism."

"And I'm so glad and happy," added Grace, who had been seeing happy visions in the firelight, "to think that all his friends had faith in him when he most needed it."

"You bet we did," said Allen heartily. "There wasn't one of us who doubted him for a minute."

"I wonder when he'll get here," said Amy, rising slowly and strolling over to the window. "I hope the colonel lets him out before twelve o'clock."

"Oh, he'll be here almost any minute now," said Allen reassuringly. "Meanwhile, suppose you play something for us, Betty—something soft and sweet to match the firelight—and you," this last so softly that none but Betty heard.

Smiling a little, Betty rose and walked over to the piano. Allen followed her.

"What shall I play?" she asked, looking up at him with a sweet seriousness, that made him want desperately to gather her in his arms and tell her —oh, so many things! Instead, he said:

"Play 'Keep the Home Fires Burning.' It's the most appropriate thing to-night. And Betty, sing it—sing it—to me——"

"If I can," she murmured. "You know what

happened when I tried to sing it before—and it's apt to be harder to-night."

"Try, anyway," he urged; and so she began, in the sweetest voice in the world, or so Allen thought, to sing one of the most beautiful songs ever composed.

And how she sang it! Before she had half finished it, the girls were feeling for their handkerchiefs and the boys were staring hard into the fire.

She sang it again—more softly than before, and when the last sweet note had died away, there was not a dry eye in the room.

"Betty, oh, Betty!" cried Allen, leaning across the piano toward her, thrilling her with the new earnestness in his voice, "will you keep the home fires burning for me—so that when I come back —Betty, when I come back——"

She nodded, not trusting herself to speak, and held out a trembling hand to him.

"There will always be one—waiting for you," she whispered softly.

"Hello, folks!"

They turned suddenly and found Will standing in the doorway. Then, such a welcome as they gave him! It made up to him for all these months when he had seemed to stand on the outside, looking in.

"Come over to the fire and tell us all about it," Betty commanded. "Allen told us something, but we want to know the whole story—every little bit of a detail."

Will fairly beamed and entered into the story with the greatest enthusiasm.

"I really didn't do anything much," he finished modestly. "And at the end it was you girls that did all the work. I was just an 'also ran.'"

"But, isn't there something you left out?" drawled Frank, pretending to yawn and gazing into the fire. "It seems to me——"

"Gee," said Will, surprised at himself, "if I didn't really forget the most important part——"

"Now what are you talking about?" cried Mollie, while the girls pricked up their ears and began to scent a new mystery. "What did you forget?"

"Well," said Will, his eyes twinkling, and speaking with exasperating slowness, "do you happen to remember an eventful night on Pine Island, when Roy went to sleep——"

"Aw, cut it out," grumbled Roy. "I guess I'll never be able to live that down."

"Well, what about it?" cried Betty, at the limit of her patience, while the other girls looked threatening. "Please, Will——"

"Do you happen to remember," drawled Will,

"that on that same night you lost some jewelry?"

"Oh, you found it!" they cried, fixing him with four pairs of bright, incredulous eyes. "Will, where is it?"

"Some of it's here," he went on, pulling a small bag from his pocket and opening it carefully while they crowded around him, fairly smothering him in their eagerness, "and the rest of it's in the pawn shop. We found the tickets on him, though——"

"My watch!"

"My necklace!"

"My lavallière!"

"My pearl brooch!"

These and other exclamations like them made such a babel of sound that the boys clapped their hands over their ears and looked at one another in comic dismay. This lasted so long that the boys had to pick up their caps and start for the door, before the girls consented to notice them.

"Where are you going?" asked Betty, while the other three stopped talking long enough to look surprised.

"We didn't think you'd miss us," said Roy plaintively. "So we were going away from here —that's all."

"Now, who's a flock of geese, I'd like to know," laughed Betty, as they coaxed their neg-

lected swains back to the fire. "We couldn't very well help being excited, could we?"

"And to think," said Grace, beaming, "that we not only helped to catch a wanted spy, but helped to recover our own jewelry at the same time!"

"No wonder we had to pat ourselves on the back," chuckled Mollie. "Just wait till we tell the folks at home about it."

"Pretty good day's work," Roy admitted indulgently. "Couldn't have done much better myself."

They fell silent after that, each one busy with his own thoughts, each one seeing, in the fantastic, ever-changing heart of the fire, a little of his or her own future. And they were very happy.

Suddenly Grace broke the silence.

"And now," she said, glancing with love and pride at Will, who smiled fondly back at her, "what do you expect to do, dear?"

"Enlist," cried Will, jumping to his feet. "Thank heaven I can do it now with a clear conscience. I'm going to get into the big game quick and help give Fritz some of his own medicine. Gee, fellows, are we going to do it—are we?"

"I should smile!" they cried, their eyes gleaming with anticipation. "All we want is the chance!"

Quick as a flash Betty ran to the piano and began to play the "Star-Spangled Banner." Instantly the others were on their feet and singing with all the pent-up fervor of the last six months, emotions almost too big to master finding expression in the stirring melody.

"And we're all in it together," cried Betty, eyes bright and cheeks flaming, "for our dear country—for America!"

And, at the greatest moment of their lives, fired by patriotism, confident of victory, we once more, slowly, reluctantly, with many backward glances, take leave of our Outdoor Girls.

THE END

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